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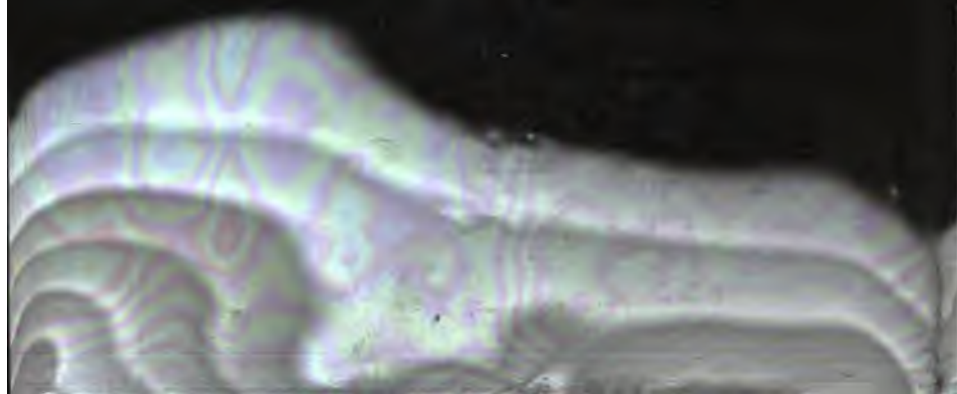
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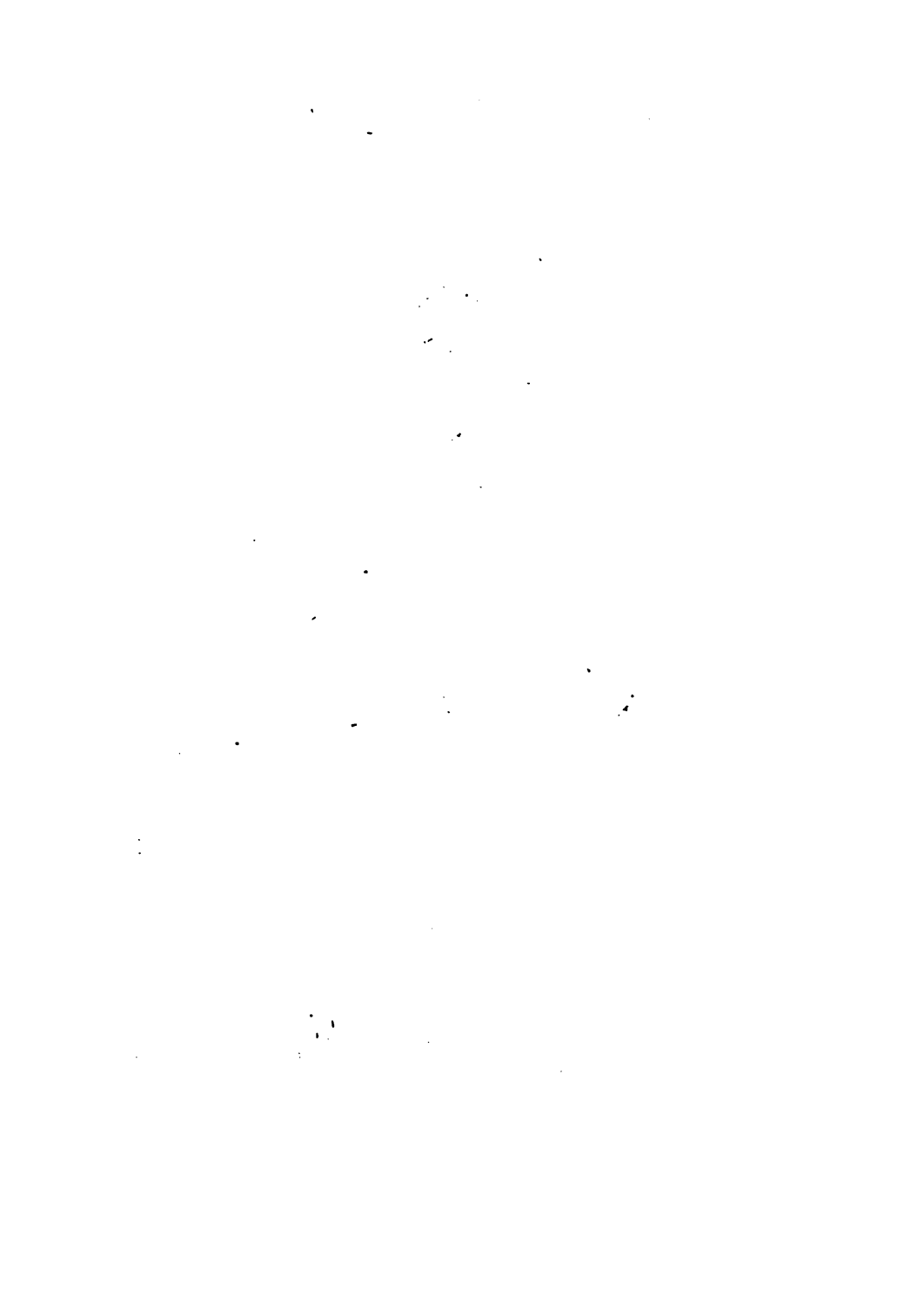
NO STRETCHING





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NO SURRENDER.

From the German of E. Werner.

BY
CHRISTINA TYRRELL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. I.



LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,
Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty the Queen.

1879.

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251. f. 185.



NO SURRENDER.



CHAPTER I.



THE whole landscape lay in bright sunshine. Clear as a mirror gleamed the broad smooth surface of the lake, faithfully reflecting the image of the town which rose in picturesque beauty on its shores, whilst in the distance, vividly distinct, appeared the jagged peaks and dazzling summits of the snow-mountains.

A suburb rich in villas and gardens lined the shore. In its midst stood a pretty, detached habitation of modest aspect. It was a one-storied cottage, by no means spacious, and showing signs of no special luxury within or without. An open vine-traceried veranda formed well-nigh its sole ornament; yet there was an air of refinement about the little place, and it had a right friendly pleasant look, thanks to its fresh white walls and green jalousies; while the surrounding garden, not very large, truly, but highly cultivated, and stretching away to the border of the lake, had a peculiar charm of its own, and greatly added to the general attractiveness of the little country-house.

In the veranda, which afforded ample protection from the sun's ardent rays, and where, even at noonday, a certain degree

of coolness might be enjoyed, two gentlemen were pacing, talking as they walked.

The elder of the two was a man of, it might be, about fifty years ; but old age seemed to have come upon him prematurely, for his form was bent and his hair as grey as it could well be. The deeply-furrowed face, too, bore evidence of by-gone struggles, perhaps of sorrows and sufferings of many kinds endured in the past, and the sharp, bitter lines about the mouth gave a harsh and almost hostile expression to a countenance which must once have been bright with ardour and intelligence. In the eye alone there still blazed a fire which neither years nor the hard experiences of life had had power to quench, and which was in singular contrast with the silvered head and drooping carriage.

His companion was much younger ; a man slender of build and of average height, with features which, though not strictly regular, were yet in the highest degree attractive, and grave, earnest blue eyes. His light chestnut hair waved over a fine open forehead. There was that slight paleness of complexion which tells not of sickliness, but of keen intellectual activity and a constant mental strain ; and the predominant expression was one of quiet steadfastness, such as is but rarely stamped on a face at seven or eight and twenty. There could hardly be a sharper contrast than that afforded by these two men.

“So you are really going to leave us already, George ?” asked the elder in a regretful tone.

The young man smiled.

“Already ? I think I have made claim

enough on your hospitality, Doctor. When I came, I had no intention of staying on for weeks; but you received me with such hearty kindness, I might have been some near and dear relation, instead of a stranger who could only boast a college friendship with your son. I shall never forget——”

“Pray do not thank me for that which has been a pleasure to myself,” the Doctor interrupted him. “I only fear that at home you may have to pay a penalty for the hospitality you have here enjoyed. To have stayed at my house will be accounted a crime in Assessor Winterfeld—a crime which will hardly meet with forgiveness. I have never concealed from you the fact that your visit here is a venture which may compromise your whole position.”

The ironical tone of this warning called up a transient flush to young Winterfeld's brow, and accounted for the vivacity with which he answered :

"I think I have shown you that I am capable of maintaining my own independence under all and any circumstances. My position, I should hope, lays me under no obligation to avoid friendly relations which are of a purely private nature."

"You think not ? I am convinced of the contrary. On your return we shall see which of us is right. Remember this, George; you are under Baron von Raven's régime."

"I do not imagine that my chief troubles himself greatly about the holiday excursions of his officials," said George, quietly. "He is severe, inexorable even, in all matters relating to the service, but he

never interferes in our private concerns That justice I must do him, though I do not rank among his friends. I am, as you know, a thorough-going opponent of the tendencies he represents, and therefore personally opposed to himself; albeit, as his subordinate, I find myself for the time being compelled to silence and obedience."

"For the time being?" echoed the Doctor, sarcastically. "I tell you, he means to teach you lasting silence and obedience, and if you do not show yourself teachable he will crush and ruin you. That is his way, as it is the way of all such despicable *parvenus*."

George shook his head gravely.

"You go too far. The Baron has many enemies, and I do not doubt that in secret much hatred and bitterness are entertained

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towards him, but as yet no one has ventured to speak his name with contempt."

"Well, I venture it, then," said the Doctor, with sudden vehemence; "and, truly, not without good grounds."

The young man looked at him in silence, then, after the pause of a second, he laid his hand on his arm.

"Dr. Brunnow, forgive me if I ask you a question which may, perhaps, seem in-

"Impossible !" exclaimed George. " You and——"

" His Excellency Baron Arno von Raven, Governor of the Province of R——, and closest friend and confidant of our present rulers," completed the Doctor, laying a sharp, scornful emphasis on each word. " That surprises you, does it not ?"

" Certainly. I had no notion of any such acquaintance between you."

" How should you ! it dates almost half a generation back. In those days he was only plain Arno Raven, and as poor and unknown as myself. We learned to know each other in stormy, troubled times, meeting in the ranks of the party to which we both belonged. Raven with his splendid talents and restless energy soon worked to the front, and became leader of us all.

We followed him with blind confidence—I more especially, for I loved him as I have loved no human being since, not even my wife or child. All the enthusiasm of my youth was lavished on him. He was my hero, to whom I looked up with ardent admiration—my ideal, my pride—until the day when he betrayed and deserted us all, when he sacrificed honour to ambition, and sold himself body and soul to our enemies, giving us up at the same time to perdition. They call me ‘misanthropic,’ those wise folk who have never had their illusions rudely dispelled—who have never met despair face to face. If indeed I am a misanthrope, my nature was warped to bitterness on that day when, losing my friend, I lost with him all faith in mankind.”

He turned away in great agitation.

Evidently the memory of that long by-gone event still shook the man's whole being to its depths.

"So there is some foundation for those reports which hint at a dark spot in the Baron's past," remarked George, thoughtfully. "I have heard rumours and vague allusions, but no one ever appeared to have any positive knowledge on the subject. The matter must always have escaped publicity, for Raven is only known as the energetic, unyielding representative of the government."

"Renegades are ever the most untiring persecutors of the faith they have abandoned," said Brunnow, gloomily; "and there was always a dangerous element at work in Arno Raven, a fierce, consuming, all-mastering ambition. This was his ruling passion, the true mainspring of his

actions; and this it was which finally brought about his fall. His thoughts were constantly running on power and greatness to be achieved in the future; he longed to govern, to command, cost what it might, and he has obtained his heart's desire. His career is absolutely unexampled. From poverty and obscurity he has risen step by step from one dignity, from one high distinction to another. On becoming the son-in-law of the minister whose acknowledged favourite he had ever been, he was exalted to the rank of Baron, and at this moment he is the well-nigh omnipotent governor of one of the principal provinces of the land. He stands on the lofty pinnacle whereof he used to dream; but I, whom he drove into prison and into banishment, who can look back only on a weary course of years full of the

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most bitter disappointments, and who, standing now on the threshold of old age, have still to wrestle with the material cares of life—I would not exchange my lowly lot for his greatness. He has paid for it a heavy price—the price of his honour.”

The speaker was terribly agitated. He broke off, and, turning, strode a few times up and down the veranda, striving to conquer his emotion. After a while he came back to George, who was standing silent and full of thought.

“I have not touched on this subject for years,” he began again ; “but I owed it to you to speak frankly. You are no blind, ductile instrument, such as Raven requires, such as alone he suffers about him ; and I fear an hour may come when you will find yourself compelled to refuse him obedience, if you wish to remain true to your prin-

ciples, and to quit yourself as an honourable man. What your after-fate may be beyond that turning-point is indeed another question. Stand fast, George! Through all the dislike and antagonism you nurture in your heart towards him, there runs a subtle, secret vein of admiration for this man, and I can understand it but too well. He has ever exercised a really magic influence over all who have come into contact with him. You yourself cannot altogether escape it, and for this reason I have thought it necessary to enlighten you on the subject of Baron von Raven. You know now what manner of man he is."

"I thought so, I declare! There they are again in the thick of their politics, or immersed in some other interminable debate," said a voice behind them. "I

have been hunting for you all over the house, George. Good-morning, father."

The speaker, who now stepped into the veranda, was, apparently, George's junior by some years, but taller and of stronger build than his friend—a fresh-looking, vigorous young man, with a frank open face, clear eyes, and a plentiful crop of curly light hair. He cast one scrutinising glance at his father's face, still crimsoned by agitation, and then went on :

" You should not excite yourself so much with your discussions, father. You know how injurious it is to you ; moreover, you have been hard at work already this morning, I see."

So saying, he walked up to a table covered with books and papers, which stood at a little distance, and began turning over some written pages.

"Let that alone, Max," said his father, impatiently. "You will disarrange the manuscript, and you take no interest in these abstruse scientific studies."

"Because I have no time for them," answered Max, quietly laying down the papers. "A young assistant-surgeon at a hospital cannot sit all day poring over his books. You know I have my hands pretty full."

"Time might be found," remarked Brunnow. "What you lack is inclination."

"Well, inclination too, if you like. Practice is my study, and I dare say it will get me on as far."

"As far as your ambition takes you, no doubt." There was an unmistakable slight in the father's tone. "You will very probably find an extensive practice, and look on your calling altogether in the light of

a lucrative profession. I do not question it in the least."

14 At this Max evidently had to fight down some rising irritation, but he answered with tolerable calm :

"I shall certainly found a practice of my own at the earliest opportunity. You might have done the same twenty years ago, but you preferred to write medical works which bring you in very little money, and, at the best, only obtain recognition from some few choice spirits among your colleagues. Tastes differ."

"As our conception of life differs. You do not know what it means to sacrifice yourself—to live for science."

"I sacrifice myself for nobody," said Max, defiantly. "I intend conscientiously to fulfil my duties in life, and shall think that, in so doing, I have done enough."

You have a fancy for useless self-immolation, father. I have none."

"Leave this incorrigible realist to his errors, Doctor," struck in George, who from the irritated tone of both men began to fear a scene, such as was not unfrequent between father and son. "I have long given up all attempt to convert him. But now we will neither of us disturb you any longer. Max promised to go for a walk with me to the wood this morning, as soon as he returned."

"Now, just at mid-day?" asked the Doctor, in surprise. "Why not go later?"

Some slight confusion was visible in young Winterfeld's face, but he quickly mastered it.

"Later on I have to pack up and make ready for my departure, and I should like

to take one last look at the lake and the mountains. It is hard on me, I assure you, to go away and leave them."

"That I believe," said Max, with a peculiar and rather malicious intonation, but he relapsed into silence on meeting his friend's half-angry, half-imploring glance.

Brunnow seemed to attach no importance to the matter. He waved them a hasty farewell, and went up to his writing-table again, while the two young men strode through the garden, and, Max having opened the iron gate, struck into the footpath which ran close to the border of the lake. They went on some time in silence. George seemed grave and thoughtful, and the young surgeon was evidently in a very ill-humour, to which the recent conversation with his father and the approaching departure of his

friend may have conducted in equal shares.

“So this is the last day you are to spend here!” he began at length; “and what good can I have of it—what good have I had indeed of your visit at all? Half the time you have passed with my father, declaiming against the condition of our beloved country in general, and the dictatorship of Baron von Raven in particular. When, after unheard-of efforts, I have been so lucky as to withdraw you from the political ground, you have abused my friendship in the most shameful manner, making me stand sentry in the noonday glare, at a temperature of 86° Fahrenheit. A most agreeable post, I must say!”

“What a way of speaking!” said George, impatiently. “I merely asked you——”

“To keep watch that you should not be

disturbed in your meetings—quite accidental meetings, of course—with Fräulein von Harder. That is what we, in plain English, call ‘standing sentry!’ How many such chance encounters may you, with or without my co-operation as walking gentleman, have enacted on this stage? Take care the mamma does not get to hear of these sociable little rambles.”

“You know that my leave is out, and that I must start to-morrow,” was the rather curt reply.

Max heaved a little sigh.

“Ah, the interview is likely to last a tremendous time to-day, I see. Don’t be offended, old fellow. It may be very interesting to you to swear eternal fidelity by the sun, moon, and stars, but, for an outsider, the business is excessively tedious, particularly with such a temperature as we

have to-day. I may safely say it is the warmest proof of friendship I ever gave a man in my life."

Talking thus, they had reached the "wood," really nothing more than a group of chestnut-trees shading a stretch of meadow-land on the border of the lake. It was a favourite and much-frequented resort of the townsfolk, for from thence might be had a splendid panoramic view of the lovely sheet of water and the grand surrounding mountains. Now, at noonday, the spot was quite solitary and deserted. George, who had hurried on before, stood still and gazed around expectantly, but in vain. Max sauntered up slowly after him, and in his turn took a general survey, but with no better result. Failing to discover a figure in the distance, he sat down beneath one of the mightiest chestnut-

trees, on a grassy bank which formed a natural resting-place, and whence the finest prospect might be enjoyed. Leaning back in the most comfortable posture, he watched his friend with a mixture of raillery and compassion, as the latter paced up and down, betraying in every look and action his feverish uneasiness.

“ I say, George, what is to be the end of this love affair, this romance of yours ?” he began again after a protracted silence.

The other frowned.

“ How often have I begged you not to speak of it in that tone ?”

“ Did I not express myself tenderly enough ? There is plenty of romance in your love, I should fancy. A young middle-class Government clerk without fortune or prospects, and a high-born

Baroness and future heiress—secret meetings—prospective opposition of the whole family, struggles and emotions *ad infinitum*. I congratulate you on all these pleasant things. I should look on the business as an awkward one myself, I know.”

“That I believe,” said George, with a touch of sarcasm ; “but, my dear Max, you really are not competent to pronounce on such matters.”

“My nature being an out-and-out prosaic one,” concluded Max, with perfect equanimity. “Well, I can’t say you there tell me anything new. My father perpetually impresses on my mind the fact that I lack all tendency to the ideal. He has conscientiously striven to impart to me these more elevated views and notions, but, unfortunately, it has not answered. I do not belong to the class of ‘highly organised natures’



such as yourself, for instance. You are far more to my father's taste, and I think he would not hesitate a moment could he adopt you in my place."

A smile passed over George's face.

"If you agree to it, I have no objection."

"Just try it," said Max, dryly. "He is exceptionally gracious to you, because he happens to have taken a special fancy to you ; but, in real truth, he is within 'an ace of turning misanthrope and man-hater. Nothing satisfies him. All his judgments are distorted, his views tinged by that bitter irritability of spirit which he ascribes to an unappeased yearning after the ideal, and that is the ground of the incessant warfare between us. He cannot forgive me for finding myself tolerably comfortable in this miserable, worthless world, with which

he himself is at perpetual loggerheads. In fact, matters between us are growing more and more unbearable day by day."

"You do your father an injustice," said George, soothingly. "The man who has given up, as he has given up, home, standing, and freedom, to that which he calls his ideal, has a right to apply a higher standard to the world and to his fellow-creatures."

"But I am not up to the higher standard, you see," declared the young surgeon, testily. "You are much nearer the mark. This my father detected at once, and sequestered you to his own use accordingly. You would sink wonderfully in his estimation though, if he could guess that, in the very first days of your stay here, you committed the boundless folly of falling in love."

“Max, I beg of you,” his friend broke in angrily ; but Max was now fairly under way, and was not to be stopped.

“I repeat what I have said : it is folly,” he asserted, roundly. “You, with your serious views of life, your unceasing toil, your ideal aims—very superfluous things in reality, no doubt, but with you they must be taken into account—and this perverse spoilt child—this Gabrielle von Harder, who has been brought up in the midst of riches and in the lap of luxury, and has been inoculated with all the prejudices of her aristocratic caste ! Do you really imagine that she will ever have the smallest understanding for the things which interest you ? I tell you she will give you up directly the grave consequences of this holiday idyll become apparent to her, and the influence of her

family makes itself felt. You will stake your all on this game, will waste your best strength in struggling with the relations, only to be sacrificed at last to some count or baron, who by birth will be a suitable *parti* for her young ladyship."

"No, no," said George, with a burst of vehemence. "You hardly know Gabrielle. You have never been in her company more than a few minutes at a time, whilst I——" He stopped suddenly, then went on in a softened voice—"I know well that there is a gap between us, a great divergence besides that of outward circumstances, but she is so young, she has hitherto seen life's sunny side only—and there are no limits to my love for her."

Max shrugged his shoulders in a way

which plainly said that the last reason appeared to him highly unsatisfactory.

“Every man to his taste!” he said coolly. “This limitless love would not exactly be mine, and, so far as I see, there is very little to be gained by it. But”—he stood up—“it is time for me to go on duty, for I see the flutter of a light garment out yonder near those elder-bushes, and a glow on your countenance as though the seventh heaven had opened to your delighted vision. George, do me one favour, I entreat. Let not the fact altogether escape your mind that there is such a thing as the noonday hour, and that ordinary mortals are accustomed then to take a repast. An extremely unpractical idea of yours, this rendezvous just in the middle of the day! I hope you will not let me

perish from starvation, as a reward for my self-denying friendship."

Having thus delivered himself, Max Brunnow beat a retreat. Young Winterfeld hardly heard what he said. He was intently watching the light slender figure of a girl who now approached from the outskirts of the wood. She came swiftly and gracefully over the grass towards him, and in a few minutes stood at his side.

"Here I am, George. Have you been waiting long? It really seemed as if I should not get away to-day unnoticed, and I very nearly gave up the attempt altogether. But it would have been too cruel to let my knight languish here in vain. I believe you would never, never have forgiven me, if I had let you depart without a solemn farewell."

George held fast the little hand which after the first slight pressure sought to withdraw itself, and there was a reproachful accent in his voice, as he said :

“Is this separation so light a thing to you, Gabrielle? Have you no other words for me at parting than these teasing quips and jests?”

The young lady looked up in surprise.

“Separation? Parting? Why, we shall see each other again in a month.”

“In a month! Does that seem to you so short a time?”

Gabrielle laughed.

“It is just four times seven days. You must manage to live through them in some way; but after that we shall be coming to R—— ourselves, you know. You have a great deal to do with my guardian, have you not?”

"With Baron von Raven? Certainly. I work in his bureaux, as you are aware, and have to make reports to him from time to time."

"I hardly know him," said Gabrielle, indifferently. "I have just seen him now and again when he has come on a short visit to the capital, and that is all. The last time was three years ago. On that occasion his Excellency hardly deigned to notice me—treated me, in fact, exactly like a child, though I was then quite fourteen. You may imagine that I was in no way delighted at the prospect of living under his roof for the future, until"—here she smiled roguishly—"until I made the acquaintance of a certain George Winterfeld, and heard from him that he had the privilege of being one of my guardian's secretaries."

A strange look flitted across George's features, a look which seemed to say he was of a different opinion as to the 'privilege.'

"You deceive yourself if you build any hopes on that circumstance," he replied gravely. "The intercourse I hold with the Baron is purely official in its nature, and he well knows how to restrict it within the narrowest possible limits. In all else I stand wide as the poles apart from him. A young, middle-class man, holding as yet only a subordinate government appointment, does not find admittance to the Governor's circles, and can hardly venture to claim acquaintance with the Baroness von Harder. There will be distance enough between us, even though I come daily to the house in which you dwell. Here in this holiday freedom we have had

the chance of learning to know, to love each other."

"In reality, you owe it to our boat which struck on the sand-bank just at the right time," put in Gabrielle. "Do you remember our first meeting, George? To this day mamma believes that she was in deadly peril, and looks on you as her deliverer, because you brought us cleverly through the shallow water to land. She would hardly have consented else to receive such frequent visits from one bearing your plebeian name; but the man who has saved one's life must be an exception, of course. If she did but know that her hero has already made me a declaration of love!"

The undisguised triumph expressed in the last words seemed to grate upon the young man. He fixed his eyes on her



countenance with a scrutinising, anxious gaze.

“And if the Baroness should hear of it, sooner or later, what would you do?”

“Present you to her in all due form as my future lord and master,” declared Gabrielle, with comic solemnity. “There would be an explosion, of course: tears, reproaches, hysterics—mamma is a capital hand at all these, but it comes to nothing. She invariably gives in at last, and I get my own way.”

She said all this airily, carelessly, laughing gleefully as she spoke. The thought of a catastrophe which would have filled any other maiden with alarm, was, it appeared, positively diverting to the young Baroness Harder. She had seated herself on the grassy mound, and taken off her straw hat. The sunbeams, which here and

there pierced through the thick leafy canopy of the chestnut-trees, played on her luxuriant fair hair and blooming face, whence a pair of great sparkling brown eyes looked merrily forth into the world. The face with its delicate, pure outlines, was undoubtedly of fascinating loveliness, but it was wanting in that soul-speaking depth of expression which gives to the human countenance its highest charm. Beneath this radiant, beaming gaiety, one might have sought in vain any token of graver deeper feeling. This want, however, hardly lessened the attractiveness of her fresh beauty, for all about her breathed of rosy youth, of life's happy, blossoming spring time. She seemed the embodied reflection of the landscape out yonder, sunny and light as herself.

George looked at her with a sin-

gular mixture of vexation and tenderness.

"Gabrielle, you treat all this as so much sport, and seem to have no idea of the troubles which menace us, of the battles we shall have to fight!"

"Is the thought of battle alarming to you?"

"To me?" A flush mounted to the young man's brow. "I am ready to cope with every difficulty, if only you will stand steadily by me. But you mistake if you reckon on your mother's customary compliance in this instance when all her prejudices will be aroused, all her family traditions evoked in opposition. And even if you should succeed in winning her over, nothing will change your guardian's views. I know him. He will never give his consent."

Gabrielle leaned her fair head against the tree's mighty trunk, and plucked carelessly at some blades of grass.

"I do not care for his consent," she said. "I shall not allow him to dictate to me one way or the other. Let him try to coerce me!"

"No one will attempt to coerce you, but they will separate us," replied George. "The very moment our love is discovered, our separation will be decreed. I know it, and it is this knowledge alone which imposes silence on me. You little guess how the secrecy, which has such a charm for you, the continued anxious concealment, distresses and humiliates me; how contrary it is to my whole nature. Now for the first time I feel all the hardship of being poor and unknown."

"What does it matter if you are poor?"



asked Gabrielle, carelessly. "I shall be very rich one day. Mamma is always telling me that I am to be Uncle Raven's sole heiress."

George was silent, setting his lips tightly as though to keep down some bitter feeling.

"Yes, you will be rich," he said at last ;
"you will be only too rich."

"I really believe you mean it as a reproach," pouted the young lady, with a highly ungracious look.

"No, but it opens out one more gap between us. If you were in the same position of life as myself, I might come to you fearlessly, and ask, not for your hand at once, perhaps, but for your plighted faith, until such time as I could offer you a home of your own. As it is, what would Baron von Raven say, I wonder, if I ventured to

propose to him for the hand of his ward and presumptive heiress! He stands in your father's place. You are under his authority."

"Yes, but only until I come of age. In a few years, my lord's guardianship and authority will expire together. Then I shall be free."

"In a few years!" echoed George.
"And what will be your feelings then?"

There was such sorrowful apprehension in his words that Gabrielle looked up half-frightened, half-offended.

"George, do you doubt my love?"

He clasped her hand tightly in his.

"I have faith in you, my Gabrielle; trust me in return. I am not the first man who has worked his way up, and I have always been taught to look forward with confidence, and to depend on my own strength.

I will strain every nerve for your sake. You shall not be ashamed of your choice."

"Yes, you will have to make me the wife of an Excellency at least," laughed Gabrielle. "I shall fully expect that you will become a Governor or a Minister some day. Do you hear, George? No other title will suit me."

George suddenly dropped the hand which still rested in his own. He had, no doubt, looked for some other answer to those fervent words which had come from the very depths of his heart.

"You do not understand me. How, indeed, should you know anything of the serious, earnest side of life! No shadow has as yet crossed your path."

"Oh, I can be serious enough," Gabrielle assured him. "Most uncommonly serious."

You do not know me, my real nature, thoroughly yet."

"Possibly," said the young man, with a rush of bitterness. "In any case, *I* have not had power to arouse your deeper self."

Gabrielle saw very well that he was hurt, but it did not please her to notice his humour. She teased and jested on, giving full rein to her high spirits, and indulging in all her wilful little ways, sure of her influence which had often stood fiery tests, and which worked again now. The cloud dispersed from George's brow. Anger and resentment could not hold good before the chatter of those rosy lips, and when the dear face looked up at him, roguish and smiling, it was all over with his resistance—he smiled too.

The clocks in the town on the opposite shore began to strike twelve. The chimes

rang out distinctly over the lake, warning the young people that it was time to part. George raised his darling's hand to his lips, and kissed it passionately. The near neighbourhood of the high-road and of the adjacent country houses forbade any further mark of tenderness. Gabrielle did indeed seem to take the parting lightly. For one moment a shade fell over her, it is true, and a tear even glistened in her brown eyes, but next minute all was bright and sunny again. She threw a last kiss to her faithful lover, and hurried away. George's eyes followed her until she disappeared from view.

"Max is right," he said, dreamily. "We are ill-mated, this spoilt child of fortune and I ! Why must I love her of all others, differing from me as she does in all wherein we should be most united ? Why, in

deed? Ah, I love her—and that is all the answer.”

In spite of his indignant repudiation of it, his friend's warning seemed to have found an echo in the young man's breast; but what could reason and reflection avail against the passion that had taken possession of his whole being? He knew from experience that there was no fighting against the charm which had taken him captive on their very first meeting, and to which on each succeeding occasion he had succumbed afresh.



CHAPTER II.

“NCE more I entreat your Excellency to recall these harsh measures. We cannot possibly make the town responsible for the acts of a few individuals.”

“I too am of opinion that it is not necessary to proceed with such rigour. It will not be difficult to trace out the guilty parties, and to secure them.”

“Your Excellency should not attach such importance to the affair. It really does not deserve it.”

The Governor, Baron von Raven, to whom all these remonstrances and remarks were addressed, appeared but little moved by them. He answered with cold politeness :

“ I am exceedingly sorry, gentlemen, to find myself in such direct opposition to you in this matter, but I have formed this resolution after mature consideration ; besides which, you know that I never recall a measure once decided on. My instructions will be carried out.”

The gentlemen assembled in the audience-room of the R—— Government-house seemed to have been engaged in a long and animated conference. They were all more or less excited, with the sole exception of the Baron himself, who leaned back in his chair with an air of imperturbable calm.

“ I should have thought that my voice, being that of the chief magistrate of the town, would have carried some weight with it,” said he who had first spoken. “ Particularly as on this occasion the Superintendent of police declares himself on our side.”

“ Certainly,” assented the official alluded to ; adding, however, with prudent reserve, “ but I have filled my present post too short a time to be thoroughly acquainted with the local concerns. His Excellency is, no doubt, better qualified to judge than I am.”

“ I only fear,” began the third personage, who wore the uniform of a colonel— “ I only fear, Baron, that this severity may be misinterpreted, that it may be construed into alarm for your own personal safety.”

A contemptuous smile played about the Baron's lips.

"Make your mind easy," he replied. "They know me too well in R——, to ascribe fear to me. That reproach will be spared me, I know, come what may."

He rose, thereby giving the signal for the breaking up of the conference.

Baron Arno von Raven, at six or seven and forty, might have been taken as a type of mature and vigorous manhood. He was still in the plenitude of his strength, physical and intellectual, and still, as was generally admitted, of a most imposing presence. There was an air of command in the very carriage of his tall and powerful form. His marked features, on which haughtiness and an indomitable energy were plainly written, could not now be styled handsome — they had indeed

never been so—but they were striking and characteristic in every line. The thick dark hair was untinged with grey, except on the temples, where some silver threads denoted that life's meridian was past. The dark eyes, so full of fire, seemed, however, to tell another tale. They spoke of life in all its pristine force and vigour ; but there was a stern, uncompromising look in them, and when they rested on any given object, they seemed literally to transfix it. His bearing was one of quiet dignity blended with proud reserve. Nothing in him betrayed a trace of the parvenu. The man looked as though from his earliest years he had had the habit of command.

“ This is not a question of myself,” he said. “ So long as abuse and menaces were conveyed to me in anonymous letters, I

simply consigned them to the waste-paper basket, and thought no more of them ; but if bills containing threatening and seditious language are, openly and before the eyes of all the world, to be pasted up on the walls of the Government-house, if attempts are to be made to insult me when I drive out, while the more respectable citizens demonstratively refrain from interfering, it becomes my duty to take some serious steps in the matter. I hold the highest post in this province. If I suffer these misdemeanours, if I tolerate these offences directed against my person, I thereby endanger the authority of the Government, which it is my office to represent, and which I am bound to uphold under all circumstances. I repeat, Mr. Mayor, that I regret to be under the necessity of ordering certain police-regulations which may

prove irksome and vexatious, but the town has only itself to thank for them."

"We know by experience that your Excellency does not allow any considerations of public convenience to influence you in such cases," said the burgomaster, sharply. "I can do no more, therefore, than leave with you the entire responsibility of such harsh proceedings—and with this, I think, our interview may come to an end."

The Baron bowed stiffly.

"I do not know that I have ever sought to evade the responsibility of my official acts. I certainly shall not do so in this instance. Good-morning, gentlemen."

The burgomaster and the Superintendent of police left the room, and walked together through the broad galleries towards the entrance-door. The former, a grey-haired and somewhat choleric old gentleman, could

not help giving vent by the way to his long pent-up anger.

“So with all our prayers, our remonstrances, and representations, we have obtained nothing but this sovereign dictum, ‘My orders will be carried out,’” said he to his companion. “This famous phrase, a favourite with his Excellency, seems to have had its effect even upon you. Your opposition was silenced by it in an instant.”

The Superintendent of police, a man much younger in years, with a keen, cunning face and extremely polite manners, shrugged his shoulders, and answered quietly :

“The Baron is at the head of the administration, and as he has declared that in any contingency he will cover me from all responsibility, I——”

“You do as he bids you,” concluded the

other. "After all, one cannot wonder. It is not likely you should wish to share the fate of your predecessor in office."

"In any case, I hope to show myself more competent to fulfil the duties of my post than he was." The answer was courteous, but decided. "So far as I know, my predecessor was removed on account of incapacity."

"You are much mistaken. He fell, because he was not agreeable to Baron von Raven, because he occasionally took upon himself to have an opposite opinion of his own. He had to give way, of course, before the all-powerful will which has held arbitrary sway over us for so long. The attitude assumed by our Governor to-day will have shown you better than a month in office what the situation of affairs here

really is, and, if I am not mistaken, you have chosen your side already."

The last words were spoken in a very pointed manner, but the Superintendent seemed not to remark it. He only smiled affably by way of reply; and as they had now reached the door of exit, the two gentlemen parted company.

Meanwhile the Baron and his third visitor had remained closeted together. Colonel Wilten, commanding-officer of the garrison stationed at R——, was a man of right soldierly appearance, yet, notwithstanding his natural advantages, enhanced as they were by his uniform and the orders he wore, he could not bear comparison with the tall and stately figure of his host in plain civilian attire.

"You really should not proceed with too great severity, Baron," the Colonel re-



marked, taking up the thread of the conversation when the others had left. "These perpetual conflicts with the respectable citizens are looked on with great disfavour in high quarters."

"Do you suppose the conflicts are agreeable to me?" asked Raven. "But in this case to forbear would be to show weakness, and that, I hope, will hardly be expected of me."

The other shook his head dubiously.

"You are aware that I have been absent, spending a few weeks in the capital," he began anew. "During that time I mixed a good deal in ministerial circles, and I must tell you, confidentially, that opinion there is not favourable to you. You are in ill odour."

"I know it," said Raven, coldly. "I have not shown myself docile enough,

subservient enough to them ; and, besides this, they cannot forgive me my plebeian origin. To stay and hinder me in my career was beyond their power ; but there has never been any real cordiality towards me in those quarters."

"For which reason it behoves you to be prudent. Attempts are constantly being made to undermine your position. There is talk of 'arbitrary action,' of 'a tendency to encroachment ;' and every measure adopted by you is discussed and subjected to sharp, if not malignant criticism. Do you apprehend no danger from all the intrigues which are being woven against you ?"

"No, for I am too necessary in high places, and shall take good care to remain so, notwithstanding my 'arbitrary action' and 'tendency to encroachment.' I,

better than any one, can estimate the difficulties of my position here. They will not so easily find another man equal to the task of governing this province, and especially this rebellious, opposition-loving city of R——. But I thank you for the warning, nevertheless ; it accords perfectly with the advices I have myself received.”

“ Well, I thought I would give you a hint, at least,” said the Colonel, rising to go. “ But now I must be leaving. You are expecting visitors to-day, I hear.”

“ My sister-in-law, Baroness Harder, and her daughter,” replied the Governor, accompanying his visitor to the door. “ They have been spending a part of the summer in Switzerland, and are to arrive here to-day. I am expecting them every minute.”

“ I had the pleasure of occasionally meet-

ing the Baroness in the capital some years ago," remarked the officer; "and I shall hope to renew the acquaintance at an early date. Meanwhile, may I beg you to present my best respects to the lady? Good-morning, Excellency."

Half an hour later, a carriage rolled up beneath the portico of the Government-house, and Baron von Raven came down the main staircase to receive his guests.

"My dear brother-in-law, what a pleasure it is to see you again at last!" cried a lady seated in the carriage, stretching out her hand to him with much animation and tender haste.

"I bid you welcome, Matilda," said Raven, with his customary cool politeness, as he opened the door and helped her to alight. "Have you had a pleasant journey?"

It was rather disagreeably warm for travelling."

"Oh, terribly! The long drive has quite shattered my nerves. We had at first intended to stay and rest a day in E——, but the longing to see our dear uncle was so strong within us, we really *could* not wait."

The 'dear uncle' received the compliment with great indifference.

"You would have done wisely to make a halt at E——, certainly," he said. "But where is the child, Gabrielle?"

That young lady, in the act of springing lightly from the carriage without waiting for his aid, flushed scarlet with indignation at this most insulting question. The Baron himself gave a slight start of astonishment, and looked long and curiously at the 'child,' whom he had not seen

for full three years, and whose appearance now evidently took him by surprise. But his astonishment and Gabrielle's consequent triumph were of short duration.

"I am glad to see you, Gabrielle," he said quietly, and, stooping, touched her forehead with his lips. It was the same slight, formal caress which he had formerly bestowed on the maiden of fourteen, and, as he vouchsafed it, his stern, dark eyes rapidly surveyed her with one single look, sharp and penetrating, as though he would at once read the inmost workings of her mind. Then he offered his arm to his sister-in-law to lead her upstairs, and left the young lady to follow them.

The Baroness launched into a torrent of pretty speeches and affectionate inquiries, which met with monosyllabic answers alone. Her flow of words, how-



ever, was not to be checked ; it only ceased on their reaching the wing wherein were situated the rooms destined to the ladies' use.

"These are your apartments, Matilda," said the Baron, pointing to the open doors. "I hope they will be to your taste. This bell summons the servants. Should anything be wanting to your comfort, I trust you will let me know. I will now leave you for a while. You must both be fatigued from your long journey, and require rest. We shall meet at dinner."

He went, visibly relieved at having accomplished the awkward and troublesome task of welcoming his guests. Hardly had the door closed behind him, when the Baroness, hastily throwing off her travelling wraps, began to inspect her surroundings. The four rooms appointed

to their use were fitted up with great elegance, and even with an amount of splendour. The furniture was very handsome, the curtains and carpets being of the thickest and richest materials. In all things the habits and convenience of high-bred visitors had been consulted, and regard had been had to their every possible requirement. In short, there was no fault to be found ; and Madame von Harder came back from her tour of inspection in an eminently contented frame of mind.

Presently she noticed that her daughter was still standing in the middle of the room they had first entered, not yet divested of her hat and travelling-cloak.

“Will you not take your things off, Gabrielle ?” she asked. “What do you think of the rooms ? There will be comforts about us here, thank Heaven ! such

as one is accustomed to. We shall prize them after all the hardships of our long Swiss exile."

Gabrielle paid no heed to the words.

"Mamma, I don't like Uncle Raven," said she suddenly, with the utmost decision.

The tone was so unusual, in so sharp a contrast to the young lady's habitual style, that her mother looked up in surprise.

"Why, child, you have hardly seen him!"

"Never mind, I don't like him. He treats us with an indifference, a condescension which is absolutely offensive. I can't understand how you could put up with such a reception!"

"Nonsense, dear," said the Baroness, soothingly. "It is my brother-in-law's natural manner to be formal and chary of

speech. You will get accustomed to it when you know him better, and grow fond of him."

"Never!" cried Gabrielle, vehemently. "How can you expect me ever to grow fond of Uncle Arno, mamma? I have never heard anything but ill of him. You always used to say he was a horrible tyrant; papa never spoke of him except as a *parvenu* or adventurer, and yet neither of you ventured to be anything but friendly to him, because——"

"Hush, child!" interrupted her mother, looking round in alarm to see that no one had overheard the treasonable words. "Have you forgotten that we are quite dependent on your uncle's goodness? He is implacable when he thinks himself insulted. You must never attempt to contradict him."

"Why did you all show him so much deference if he was only an adventurer?" persisted Gabrielle, obstinately. "Why did grandpapa let him marry his daughter? Why has he always been considered the leading personage of the family? I can't understand it."

"Nor I either!" exclaimed the Baroness, with a sigh. "The power that man exercises has always been inexplicable to me, as was your grandfather's predilection for him. He, with his plebeian name and his position, at that time a very subordinate one, ought naturally to have looked upon his admittance into our family as an immense privilege, as an unmerited piece of good fortune, instead of which he took it exactly as if it had been his due. No sooner had he established a footing in our house than he began to govern every one

in it, from my sister down to the servants, who stood more in awe of him than of their own master. He had my father so completely under his control that nothing was done without his advice or assistance, and all the others he simply put down, extinguished. How he did it I cannot say—enough that it was so ; and not only in our family circle, in society and the political world he rapidly gained surprising dominion. No one ventured to oppose or thwart him.”

“ Well, he will not extinguish me,” cried the girl, with a defiant toss of the head. “ Oh, he thought he should frighten me with his great solemn eyes which seem to bore one through and through, as though they would read the most secret thoughts of one’s heart ; but I am not a bit afraid of him. We shall see whether he can bend

me to his will, whether he will find me as pliable as he has found other people."

The Baroness grew alarmed. She feared, with good reason, that this exceedingly spoilt daughter who ruled her mother in everything, and was by no means accustomed to put a restraint on herself, would now give the reins to her waywardness, and display it in her behaviour to the Baron himself. She exhausted all her stock of arguments and entreaties, but with no satisfactory result.

Miss Gabrielle seemed to take a peculiar pleasure in roundly expressing her defiance of her guardian, and showed herself in no way disposed to abandon the warlike attitude she had at once taken up towards him. But her serious mood had already spent itself, having lasted a most

unusual length of time. The old petulant gaiety returned in full force.

“Mamma, I do believe you are in real earnest afraid of this old ogre of an uncle,” she cried, with a merry laugh. “Well, I am more valiant — I shall beard the monster in his den, and I promise you he will not eat me.”



CHAPTER III.



HE Government-house of R—— was an ancient castle, which for long years had been the dwelling-place of a princely family, but which in the ever-changing course of events had become the property of the State, and now served as the seat of the provincial government and the residence of its temporary head. The grand, spacious old edifice was situated on a hill just outside the town, and, in spite of the prosaic

destiny which had overtaken it in these latter days, still preserved much of its mediæval aspect.

A most picturesque object was it, with its salient towers and bay-windows, and its fine commanding site which overlooked all the country round. The original ramparts and fortifications had, it is true, long ago disappeared, surrendered to the march of modern progress, but in their stead a perfect forest of noble trees had sprung up, clothing the castle-hill, whence a broad and easy road led down to the town. From the windows of the noble old château, which rose, proud and stately, above the leafy crests, a full view might be had of the city and the wide valley beneath all circled in by mountains.

The main body of the building was exclusively assigned to the Governor's use,

the upper part being inhabited by him, while his bureaux, or 'Chancellery,' occupied the ground-floor. In the two side-wings were situated the other public offices and the quarters of such of the higher functionaries as were domiciled beneath its roof. Notwithstanding these very practical arrangements, the interior of the building, no less than the exterior, retained its antique character, which, indeed, was ineffaceably stamped on every line of its architecture.

The vaulted chambers with their deep door and window recesses belonged to the last century; long gloomy galleries and arched corridors met and crossed in every direction; echoing stone staircases led from one story to another, and the court and garden of the old stronghold were still maintained in their primitive condi-

tion. The 'Castle,' as it was briefly termed in all the neighbouring country, was, and had been from time immemorial, the pride and ornament of the good city of R——.

The present Governor had now filled the post for a long series of years. Had it not been a fact well known that he was the son of a subaltern official who had died early, leaving no fortune, his middle-class origin would never have been suspected, for the appearance he made in public and his style of living were as thoroughly aristocratic as his manners and person.

How it had come to pass that Raven had become the favourite of the then all-powerful Minister, no one knew. That Minister's penetrating glance had, most probably, detected rare ability in the young aspirant for honours.

Some pretended to know that there were other and secret reasons which had combined with this: so much is sure, he was suddenly appointed secretary to his Excellency, and in this new capacity acquired opportunities of developing his talents which he had not possessed in his former subordinate position. The secretary was soon promoted to be his master's friend and confidant, was preferred and put forward on every occasion, and even admitted into the great man's family circle. The lower rungs of the official ladder were quickly climbed, and one day society in the capital was astounded by the news, which at first seemed to be too wonderful to be believed, that the Minister's elder daughter was betrothed to the young newly-appointed Councillor. Shortly afterwards the rank of Baron was conferred on

the bridegroom expectant, and there-with he was fairly launched on his career.

The son-in-law of so influential a man found his way smoothed for him in every direction, but it was not this alone which bore him aloft with such dizzy speed. His really splendid abilities seemed only now to have found their proper field, and soon displayed themselves in a manner which made all adventitious aid superfluous. A very few years later, the 'inexplicable' conduct of the Minister who, instead of opposing, had favoured the *mésalliance*, became sufficiently intelligible. He had taken his son-in-law's measure ; he knew what was to be expected from the young man's future, and it is certain that his daughter, as Madame von Raven, played a far more brilliant part than her sister, who married a nobleman of



high lineage, but of utter personal insignificance.

When the Baron was nominated to the important and responsible post of R——, he found matters there in a critical condition. The storm of faction, which some years before had convulsed the whole land, had no doubt spent itself for the time being, but signs were not wanting that it was merely repressed, and not completely and finally laid. In the —— province especially, a perpetual ferment was kept up, and great, populous R——, the chief city of that province, stood at the head of the opposition which arrayed itself against the Government. Several high officials, succeeding each other in rapid order, had endeavoured in vain to put an end to this state of things; they lacked either the necessary resolution or the necessary

authority, and confined themselves to half measures, which adjusted temporary difficulties, but left the deeper discord strong and abiding as ever. At length Raven was appointed head of the administration, and city and province soon became aware that a firmer grasp was on the reins. The new Governor went to work with an energy, and, at the same time, with a reckless disregard of such persons and interests as stood in his way, which raised a perfect storm against him. Appeals, protests, expostulations and complaints flowed in to headquarters in one unceasing stream, but the Ministry knew too well the value of their representative not to lend him full support. Another so placed might have recoiled before the unbounded unpopularity which his proceedings brought on him, have given way, vanquished by the difficulties and

vexations inherent to the situation—Raven remained at his post. He was a man who in every circumstance of life sought, rather than avoided, a contest, and the innate despotism of his nature here found ample room for its development. He troubled himself little with considerations as to whether the measures he judged necessary were strictly within legal bounds, and met all the accusations freely hurled at him, all the charges of absolutism and a violent abuse of power, with the one steady reply : “ My orders will be carried out ! ” In this way he at length succeeded in reducing the rebellious elements to submission. Both city and province came to see that it was impossible for them to carry on the war against this man, who adopted as the rule and regulation of his conduct, not their rights, but his own might. The times



were not propitious for open resistance. A period of severe reaction had set in, and any active sedition would certainly have been nipped in the bud ; so the party of opposition submitted, reluctantly, indeed, and with an ill grace, but still submitted ; and the Governor, who had so brilliantly accomplished his task, was loaded with honours.

Years had passed since then. People had grown accustomed to the despotic *régime* under which they lived, and had learned to regard the Baron with that respect which an energetic, consistent character compels even from its enemies. Moreover, to him was owing a series of improvements which his keenest opponents could not see without satisfaction. This man, whose political action had earned for him hatred and mortal hostility, became in

another sphere the benefactor of the province committed to his charge. Indefatigable as its representative when any occasion offered of defending its interests, he was ever ready to introduce, or to support, such reforms as tended to promote the public weal. His resolution and strong powers of initiative, which had worked so banefully in one direction, grew most beneficent when turned to pacific account. Foremost amongst the advocates of any scheme likely to favour industrial enterprise, to befriend the agriculturalist, or in any way to enhance the general prosperity, he attached many interests to himself, and thus in time rallied partisans almost as numerous as his enemies. His administration was a model of order, incorruptibility, and strict discipline, and throughout the province were visible blooming evidences

of the many improvements he had planned with practical, sagacious insight, and executed with a hand which never wavered in its purpose.

The Governor lived in great style, for he possessed a considerable fortune independently of his official income. His late father-in-law had been very rich, and at his death the property had been divided between his two daughters, Madame von Raven and the Baroness Harder. The former lady's marriage had been one of those convenient matrimonial arrangements so common in the upper ranks of society. Raven had been guided in his choice simply and solely by calculation, but he never forgot that this union had opened to him his career, and his wife had at no time cause to complain of neglect or want of consideration on his part; the affection,



which was so signally absent, she did not miss. Madame von Raven was a person of very moderate intelligence, and could never have inspired any serious passion. She had accepted the hand of her father's favourite, hearing it daily predicted that a great future was in store for him, and this prophecy being fulfilled, she did not feel that more was to be desired from life. Her husband responded liberally to all her demands respecting a brilliant establishment and elegant toilettes, and gave her an enviable position in society, so no differences arose between them. They lived together on what is supposed to be a very aristocratic footing, as much apart and as strange one to the other as possible. This union, a pattern one in the eyes of the world, but a childless, had been dissolved, about seven years before the events here

recorded, by Madame von Raven's death ; and the Baron, to whom the whole fortune descended by will, had taken to himself no second wife. The proud man, whose brain was ever busy with his ambitious plans and projects, had at no time been accessible to the soft influences of love or to domestic joys ; and he would in all probability never have married, had not marriage been to him a stepping-stone by which to mount. This motive no longer existing, he did not think of burdening himself with fresh ties ; and, as he was now approaching his fiftieth year, his decision on the subject was generally accepted as final.

On the morning succeeding the arrival of Baroness Harder and her daughter, the former lady was sitting with her brother-in-law in the boudoir which formed part of her suite of rooms. The Baroness still

showed traces of beauty, which, however, had years ago bloomed and faded. In the evening, perhaps, by the tempered lustre of wax-lights, the numberless arts of the toilette might have produced a delusive effect; but now, in the broad glare of day, the truth revealed itself mercilessly to the eyes of the Governor as he sat opposite her.

"I cannot spare you these details, Matilda," he said; "though I quite understand how painful they must be to you. The matter must be discussed between us once, at least. By your wish I undertook the settlement of the Baron's affairs, so far as it was possible for me to settle them at this distance. They proved to be in a state of absolute chaos, and, even with the help afforded me by your solicitor, I had the greatest difficulty in mastering their

complications. I have at length succeeded, and the result of my labours I communicated to you in Switzerland."

The Baroness pressed her handkerchief to her eyes.

"A comfortless result!" she said.

"But one not unexpected. There was, I regret to say, no possibility of rescuing for you even a slender portion of your fortune. I advised you to go abroad, because it would have been too mortifying to you to witness the sale of your town-house and the breaking-up of your establishment in the capital. In your absence, what was really an act of necessity took the colour of a voluntary withdrawal from society, and I have been careful that the true state of the case should not transpire among your old intimate friends and associates. Happen what may now, the honour

of the name you and Gabrielle bear is safe. You need fear no attack on it from any of the creditors."

"I know that you have made great personal sacrifices," said Madame von Harder. "My solicitor wrote me all the details. Arno, I thank you."

With a touch of real feeling she held out her hand to him as she spoke, but he waved it back so coldly that any warmer impulse in her was at once checked.

"I owed it to my father-in-law's memory to act as I have acted," he replied. "His daughter and grandchild must always have a claim upon me, and their name must, at any cost, be kept free from reproach. It was these considerations which induced me to make the sacrifices, and no sentimental feelings of any sort. Sentiment, indeed, could have no ground for existence here,

for, as you are aware, there was little friendship between the Baron and myself."

"I always deeply deplored the estrangement," said the Baroness, fervently. "Of later years my husband sought in vain to bring about a better understanding. It was you who persistently avoided any friendly intercourse. Could he give you a higher proof of his esteem, of his confidence, than to entrust to you that which he held most dear? On his death-bed he named you Gabrielle's guardian."

"That is to say, having ruined himself, he made over all responsibility touching the future of his wife and child to me, whose constant enemy he had been through life. I perfectly understand the value I ought to set on that proof of his confidence."

The Baroness had recourse to her handkerchief again.

“Arno, you do not know how cruel your words are. Have you no pity, no consideration for a heart-broken widow?”

Raven made no reply, but his eyes travelled slowly over the lady's elegant grey silk dress. She had promptly laid aside her mourning at the expiration of the year's widowhood, knowing that black was unbecoming to her. The unmistakable irony she now detected in her brother-in-law's glance called up to her cheeks a slight flush of anger, or of confusion, as she went on :

“I am only just beginning to hold up my head a little. If you knew what cares, what humiliations, preceded that last terrible catastrophe, what losses unexpectedly be-

fell us on all sides! Oh, it was too horrible!"

A faint sarcastic smile flickered about the Baron's lips. He knew right well that the husband's losses had overtaken him at the gaming-table, and that the wife's one care and anxiety had been to eclipse all the other ladies of the capital by the superior richness of her toilettes and the handsome appointments of her equipages. At her father's death the Baroness had inherited the property conjointly with her sister. Her share had been squandered to the last penny, while Madame von Raven's fortune remained intact in her husband's hands.

"Enough!" he said, waiving the topic. "Let us say no more on this disagreeable subject. I have offered you a home under my roof, and I am glad that you have

accepted the proposal. Since my wife's death, I have been in some degree dependent on strangers, who preside well enough over the establishment, but who cannot in all things fill the place of the mistress of the house. You, Matilda, know how to entertain, and like receptions, fêtes, dinners, and the like—now it is precisely in regard to these matters that I have felt a want. Our interests coincide, you see, and I have no doubt we shall be mutually satisfied with each other."

He spoke in his usual cool and measured tone. Evidently Baron von Raven was not disposed to glory in the *rôle* of benefactor and deliverer, though to these relatives of his he had really acted as both. He treated the matter altogether from a business point of view.

"I will do all in my power to meet your

wishes," declared Madame von Hard following her brother-in-law's example he rose and went up to the window.

He addressed a few further indifferent questions to her, asking whether the arrangement of the rooms was to her taste whether she received proper attendance and had all she required, but he hardly listened to the torrent of words with which the lady assured him that everything was charming—delightful!

His attention was fixed on a very different object.

Just under the window of that boudoir was a little garden attached to the door-keeper's lodge. In this garden Mademoiselle Gabrielle was walking, or rather racing round and round after the door-keeper's two children, for the walk had resolved itself into a wild chase at last. When t



young lady that morning undertook a short excursion 'to see what the place was like,' as she expressed it to her mother, the place itself had but little part in the interest she manifested. She knew that George Winterfeld came daily to the Government-house, and it must be her task, therefore, to arrange some plan for those frequent meetings which George had declared to be impossible, or, at best, exceedingly difficult.

Miss Gabrielle did not adopt this view of the case, and her reconnaissance was now directed to one end and aim, namely, to discover precisely where the Baron's bureaux, in which the young official was employed, were situated. On her way, however, she fell in with the lodge-keeper's small seven-year-old boy and his little sister, and quickly made friends with both.



The bright, lively children returned the young lady's advances with confiding alacrity, and these new acquaintances soon drove all thoughts of her exploring expedition, and alas ! of him for whose sake it had been undertaken, entirely into the background.

She allowed the little ones to lead her into the small garden which was attached to the lodge, and was entirely distinct from the Castle-garden proper. She admired with them the shrubs and flower-beds, and the three rapidly advanced in intimacy. In less than a quarter of an hour a game was set on foot, accompanied by all the requisite noise, to which Miss Gabrielle contributed fully as much as her young playmates. She bounded after them over the beds, stimulating them to fresh efforts, and provoking them to ever-renewed gaiety.

Unbecoming as this no doubt was in a young lady of seventeen, and in the Governor's niece, to an unprejudiced beholder the spectacle was none the less charming. Every movement of the young girl's supple form was marked by unconscious, natural grace. The slight figure, in its white morning-dress, flitted like a sunbeam between the dusky trees. Some of her luxuriant blond tresses had grown loose in the course of her wild sport, and now fell over her shoulders in rich abundance, while her merry laughter and the children's happy shouts were borne up to the Castle windows.

The Baroness, looking down from her point of observation, was struck with horror at her daughter's indecorous conduct, especially when she became aware that Raven was intently following the scene



below. What must that haughty man, that severe stickler for etiquette, think of the education of a young lady who could comport herself in this free-and-easy manner before his eyes! The Baroness, apprehending some of those stinging, sarcastic comments in which her brother-in-law was wont to indulge, sought, as much as in her lay, to mitigate the ill impression.

“Gabrielle is wonderfully childish still at times,” she lamented. “It is impossible to make her understand that such babyish ways are highly unsuitable in a young lady of her age. I almost dread her first appearance in society—which had to be postponed a year in consequence of her father’s death. She is quite capable of behaving in that wild, reckless way in a drawing-room.”

"Let the child be natural while she may," said the Baron, his eyes still fixed on the group below. "She will learn soon enough to be a lady of fashion. It would really be a pity to check her now ; the girl is a very sunbeam incarnate."

The Baroness pricked up her ears. It was the first time she had ever heard a speech at all genial from her brother-in-law's lips, or seen in his eyes any expression other than that of icy reserve. He visibly took pleasure in Gabrielle's high spirits, and the wise woman resolved to seize the propitious moment, in order to clear up a point which lay very near her heart.

"Poor child, poor child!" she sighed, with well-simulated emotion. "Dancing on so merrily through life, and little dreaming of the serious, perhaps sorrowful,

future in store for her! A well-born, portionless girl! It is a bitter lot, and doubly bitter for one who, like Gabrielle, has been brought up with great expectations. She will find this out soon enough!"

The manœuvre succeeded beyond all anticipation. Raven, whom in general nothing would move, seemed for once to be in pliable mood, for he turned round and said in a quick, decided manner.

"What do you mean by a 'sorrowful future,' Matilda? You know that I have neither children nor relatives of my own. Gabrielle will be my heiress, and therefore there can be no question of poverty for her."

A gleam of triumph shone in the Baroness's eyes, as she thus obtained the assurance she had long so ardently desired.

"You have never declared your intentions," she remarked, concealing her satisfaction with an effort: "and I, naturally, could not touch on such a subject. Indeed, the whole matter was so foreign to my thoughts——"

"Has it really never occurred to you to speculate on the chances of my death, or on the will I might leave?" interrupted the Baron, giving full play now to the sarcasm he had hitherto partially restrained.

"My dear Arno, how can you imagine such a thing?" cried the lady, deeply wounded.

He paid no heed to this little outburst of indignation, but went on quietly:

"I trust that you have not spoken to Gabrielle on the subject"—he little knew that it had been almost a daily topic—"I

do not wish that she should be taught to think of herself as an heiress; still less do I wish that this girl of seventeen should make my will and my fortune the objects of her calculations, as it is, of course, quite natural others should do."

The Baroness drew a deep sigh.

"I meet with nothing but misconception from you. You even cast suspicion on the promptings of a mother's love, and misjudge her who, without fear or care for herself, trembles for the future of an only child!"

"Not at all," said Raven, impatiently; he was evidently weary of the conversation. "You hear, I consider such anxiety natural, and therefore I repeat the assurance I have just given you. My property having come to me from my father-in-law, I intend that it shall one day

descend to his grandchild. Should Gabrielle, as is probable, marry during my lifetime, I shall provide for her dowry ; at my death she will be, as I have said, my *sole* heiress."

The emphasis he laid on the word proved to the Baroness that for herself she had nothing to expect. Her daughter's future being assured, however, she might look on her own as secure also, and thus her double object was attained. The hardly-veiled contempt with which Raven treated her, and which Gabrielle's fine instinct had detected in the manner of his first welcome, was by Madame von Harder either unfelt or unheeded. She had in her secret heart no more love for her brother-in-law than he for her ; and in returning sweet words and gracious looks for his brusque curtness and indifference,

she was merely deferring to a stern necessity ; but the perspective of taking her place at the head of so brilliant an establishment, of shining in R— as the Governor's near relative, and, in this quality, of taking precedence everywhere, soothed, and in a great measure reconciled her to this necessity.

A few minutes later Raven traversed the anteroom, which had the same aspect as the adjoining boudoir, and, stopping a moment at the window, cast one more glance below.

“Sad that the child should have fallen to such parents, and have had such a bringing-up !” he muttered. “How long will it be before Gabrielle becomes a coquette like her mother, caring for nothing but dress, intrigues, and society gossip ? The pity of it !”

As has already been said, the Governor's official quarters, whither he now repaired, were situated on the basement floor of the Castle. He transacted much of his business in his own private study, but would frequently visit the bureaux of the various departments. The clerks therein employed were never safe from a sudden and unforeseen descent of the master, whose keen eyes descried the smallest irregularity. The official who was so unlucky as to be surprised in any breach of the regulations never escaped without a sharp reprimand from 'the chief,' who, so far as possible, directed everything in person, and introduced into his bureaux the same iron discipline which marked his general administration.

The business of the day had begun long before, and the clerks were all in their



places when the Baron entered, and, slightly bowing, walked through the offices. Some of the sections he merely passed through with one brief inquisitorial glance around ; in others he stopped, put a question, made a remark, in several cases asking to look at a document. His manner to his subordinates was cool and deliberate, but polite, and the young men's faces showed in what awe they stood of the Governor's frown.

As the latter entered the last room of the series, an elderly gentleman, who was at work there alone, rose respectfully from his desk.

Tall and meagre of person, with a face deeply lined and a stiff, unbending carriage, this individual bore himself with the grave dignity of a judge. His grey hair was carefully brushed, not a wrinkle nor

speck of dust was visible on his black suit of clothes, while a broad white neckcloth of portentous dimensions gave to its wearer a certain peculiar solemnity of aspect.

"Good-morning, Councillor," said the Baron, with more cordiality than his manner usually showed, signing to the other to follow him into a smaller side office, where he generally received his officials in single audience. "I am glad to see you back again. I missed you greatly during the few days you were absent."

Court-councillor Moser, chief-clerk and head of the bureaucratic staff, received this testimony to his indispensability with visible satisfaction.

"I hastened my return as much as possible," he replied. "Your Excellency is aware that I only applied for leave in



order to fetch my daughter from the convent in which she has been educated. I had the honour of presenting her to your Excellency yesterday, when we met in the gallery."

"It seems to me you have left the young lady rather too long under spiritual guidance," remarked Raven; "she almost gives one the impression of a nun herself. I am afraid this convent education has completely spoiled her."

The chief-clerk raised his eyebrows, and stared at his superior in dismayed astonishment.

"How does your Excellency mean?"

"I mean spoiled her for worldly purposes," the Baron corrected himself, a hardly perceptible smile hovering about his lips as he noticed the consternation depicted in the other's face.

“ Ah ! yes, indeed, there your Excellency is right”—the chief-clerk never neglected an opportunity of giving the Governor his title, even though he had to repeat it three times in a single sentence—“but my Agnes’s mind was never given to the things of this world, and she will shortly renounce them altogether. She has resolved on taking the veil.”

The Baron had taken up some papers, and stood glancing over their contents as he quietly pursued his conversation with the old gentleman, the only official whom he admitted to anything like familiar terms.

“ Well, that is hardly surprising,” he observed. “ When a young girl is left in a convent from the age of fourteen to that of seventeen, one must be prepared for some such resolve. Does it meet with your approval ?”



“It is hard for me to give up, once and for ever, my only child,” said the Councillor, solemnly. “Far be it from me, however, to place hindrances in the way of so holy a vocation. I have given my consent. My daughter is to spend some months at home, to see something of the world before she enters on her novitiate in the convent where she has hitherto been at school. The Reverend Mother wishes to avoid even the slightest appearance of constraint.”

“The Reverend Mother is, no doubt, pretty sure of her pupil,” observed the Baron, with a touch of irony, which happily escaped his hearer. “Well, if it is the young lady’s own desire, there is nothing to be said against it; but I am sorry for you who hoped to find in your daughter a support for your old age,

and who must now resign her to the nuns."

"To Heaven," emended the old gentleman, with a pious upward glance; "to Heaven, before whose claims even a father's rights must necessarily give place."

"Of course, of course—and now to business. Is there anything of importance on hand?"

"The advices received from the Superintendent of police——"

"Yes, yes, I know. They are making a great disturbance in the town about these new measures. They will have to submit to them. Anything else?"

"There is the full and detailed report to the Ministry which has already been discussed. Whom does your Excellency appoint to draw it up?"

Raven considered a moment.



"Assessor Winterfeld."

"Assessor Winterfeld!" repeated the other, slowly, and with dissatisfaction in his tone.

"Yes, I should like to give him an opportunity of distinguishing himself, or, at least, to bring him into notice. In spite of his youth, he is one of the cleverest, most able men we have."

"But not sound, your Excellency, very far indeed from sound. He has a decided liberal tendency; he leans to the opposition——"

"All the younger men do that," interrupted the Baron. "They are all red-hot reformers, eager to set the world to rights, and they consider it a proof of character to do a little in the way of opposition to the Government of their country. These ideas tone down in the course of time."



Promotion generally works a cure in such cases, and I dare say Assessor Winterfeld's will be no exception to the rule."

The chief-clerk shook his head doubtfully.

"So far as regards his abilities and many personal advantages, I fully concur in the flattering opinion your Excellency has formed of him; but certain things have come to my knowledge concerning the Assessor, certain things which, I fear, indicate flagrant disloyalty on his part. It is, I regret to say, established beyond all doubt that, on the occasion of his last leave of absence, he formed in Switzerland the most suspicious connections, and consorted with all kinds of Socialists and dangerous revolutionary characters."

"That I do not believe," said the

Baron, decidedly. "Winterfeld is not the man to hazard his future in so reckless and objectless a manner. His is not one of those flighty romantic natures which are easily assailable by such temptations. The story has another version, probably. I will inquire into it. As regards the report, I abide by my decision. May I ask you to send the Assessor to me?"

The Councillor went, and a few minutes later George Winterfeld entered the room. The young man knew that, in being chosen for the task now before him, an honour was conferred on him above all his colleagues, but the distinction seemed rather to weigh upon than to elate him. He received his chief's instructions with quiet attention, grasped the short, comprehensive directions fully, caught with apt intel-

ligence the several hints which the Governor thought well to give him, and proved by a few pithy remarks that he had made himself thoroughly conversant with the subject before him. Raven had too often to fight against the dull-witted incapacity of his subordinates not to feel satisfaction at being thus met half-way, some words now sufficing to convey his meaning, whereas he was frequently obliged to stoop to long and wearisome explanations. He was visibly well-pleased. The business in hand was despatched in a comparatively short space of time, and George, having noted down some memoranda of his instructions, only waited for the signal of dismissal.

“One thing more!” said the Baron, in no way changing the quiet, business-like tone he had used throughout the inter-

view. "You spent some time in Switzerland, I believe, during your late leave of absence."

"Yes, your Excellency."

"I am told you there sought out associates, or, at all events, formed certain connections, unsuitable to a man holding your official position. What is the truth of the matter?"

The Baron's eyes rested on the young clerk with that keen searching gaze so dreaded by those under his command. Winterfeld, however, showed neither dismay nor embarrassment.

"I sought out an old college friend in Z——," he replied calmly; "and at his warm instance stayed some weeks at his father's house, the latter being, it is true, a political refugee."

Raven frowned.

"That was an act of imprudence I should not have expected from you. You should have reflected that such a visit would naturally excite remark and arouse suspicion."

"It was a friendly visit, nothing more. I can give my word that it had not the remotest reference to politics. This is simply and solely a private affair."

"No matter, you should take your position into consideration. A friendship with the son of a man politically compromised might be passed over as harmless, though it would hardly go to further your advancement ; but intimacy with his father and a prolonged sojourn at his house should distinctly have been avoided. What is this gentleman's name ?"

"Doctor Rudolph Brunnow." The words came in clear, steady tones from

George's lips, and now it was his turn to watch his interlocutor narrowly. He saw a spasmodic contraction of the muscles—saw a swift, sudden pallor overspread the stern features, while the lips were tightly pressed together; but all this came and went with lightning-speed. In the next instant the man's habitual self-control prevailed. Accustomed at all times to show an impassive, impenetrable front to those about him, he at once regained his usual perfect composure.

“Ah, indeed; Rudolph Brunnow!” he repeated slowly.

“I do not know whether the name is familiar to your Excellency,” George hazarded, but quickly repented of his hasty speech. The Baron's eyes met his, or rather, as Gabrielle expressed it, they bored him through and through, seeking



to read the secrets of his inmost heart. There was a dark menace in that searching gaze that warned the young man to go no step further. He felt as though he were standing on the verge of an abyss.

“You are an intimate friend of Dr. Brunnow’s son,” Raven began again, after the pause of a second; “and therefore, in all probability, intimate with the father also.”

“I only made the Doctor’s acquaintance this summer, and though his views are occasionally warped by a certain harshness and bitterness, I found him an honourable and upright man, for whom I must entertain the greatest esteem.”

“You would do wisely not to express your sentiments so openly,” said the Baron, with frigid displeasure. “You are the servant of a State which has passed judgment on a certain class of political offenders,

and still inexorably condemns them. You ought not to, and must not, consort familiarly with those who publicly proclaim themselves its enemies. Your position imposes on you duties before which all mere emotional feelings of friendship must give way. Remember that, Mr. Winterfeld."

George was silent. He understood that behind the icy calm of this address there lay a threat ; understood, too, that the threat was levelled not at the official, but at the man who had been initiated into the secrets of a past which Raven had probably believed long buried and forgotten, and which now started up, phantom-like, before his eyes. Painful as it might be, the remembrance had not power to move the Baron for more than an instant. As he rose from his chair, and



slightly waved his hand in token of dismissal, the old unapproachable haughtiness marked his bearing.

“You are warned now. That which has passed shall be overlooked, considered as a hasty error. That which you may do in future will be done at your own risk and peril.”

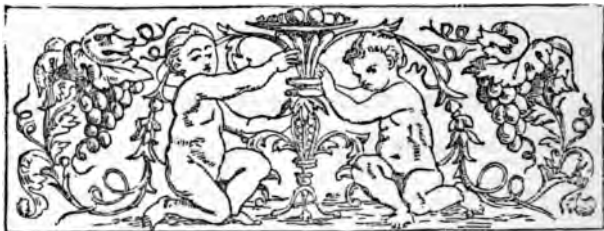
George bowed in silence, and left the room. He felt now, as he had often felt before, that Dr. Brunnow had been right in warning him against the almost magic influence exercised by Raven over all who came in contact with him.

The young man, after the weighty disclosures which had been made to him, had felt he was entitled to look down from a lofty height on the traitor and the renegade; but the power to do so had gone from him as he re-entered the charmed

circle surrounding that master-mind. Disdain could not hold its own before those eyes which so imperatively demanded obedience and compelled respect ; it glanced off scathless from the man who carried his guilty head with so high and proud a mien, as though he recognised no judge over him or his actions.

Little as George allowed himself to be affected by the exalted position and imperious bearing of his superior, just as little could he escape the spell of that chief's intellectual ascendancy. And yet he knew that sooner or later a struggle must come between himself and the Baron, who held in his hands Gabrielle's future, and, consequently, all his own chances of happiness. The secret could not be kept for ever—and what would happen when it should be known ?

The image of his love rose up before the young man's eyes—of his love of whom as yet he had caught no glimpse, though she had arrived the evening before, and at that moment the same roof covered them—and by its side appeared the iron inflexible countenance of him he had just left. Now, for the first time, he divined how severe would be the struggle by which he must hope to conquer all that he held dear in life.



CHAPTER IV.



OME weeks had passed. Baroness Harder and her daughter had made and received the necessary inauguratory visits, and the former lady had observed with much satisfaction the respect and deference everywhere shown them on the Governor's account. Still better pleased was she to discover that her brother-in-law really required nothing further from her than to play the hostess and dispense the hospitalities of the Castle ;

no troublesome or unpalatable duties were imposed on her, as she at first had feared might be the case. All care for, all the responsibility of, the great and strictly-ordered household devolved, now as before her coming, on an old major-domo who had filled the office for many years, and who regulated and directed everything, rendering account to his master alone. The Baron had probably had too good an insight into the management which had obtained in his sister-in-law's town establishment to grant her anything like independent action in such matters. Socially and ostensibly, she represented the mistress of the house, of which, in reality, she was but the guest. Some women might have felt the position in which she was thus placed a humiliating one, but a desire for domination was as foreign to the Baroness's

mind as a sense of duties to be fulfilled. She was too superficial to understand either of these great motive-powers. Affairs were shaping themselves in a far more satisfactory manner than, after the catastrophe which followed her husband's death, she had had a right to expect. She was living with her daughter in the midst of luxury ; the Baron had assigned to her a sum by no means inconsiderable for her personal expenses ; Gabrielle was his acknowledged heiress. Taking all this into consideration, they might well, she argued, bear the constraint which was the unavoidable result of the situation.

Gabrielle, too, had quickly grown accustomed to her new surroundings. The grandeur and ceremony of the Government-house, the scrupulous punctuality and strict etiquette which there prevailed, the

boundless respect and prompt service of the domestics, to whom the slightest gesture of the master's hand was a command—all this astonished the young lady, and impressed her with a certain awe. It certainly presented a striking contrast to the household system she had seen at work in her parents' city home, where the greatest external splendour and the greatest internal disorder reigned together, where the servants permitted to themselves all sorts of trickery and disrespectful negligence, where the claims of family life were lost sight of in the pursuit of pleasure. In later days, too, as the load of debt accumulated, and the difficulties grew more and more pressing, there had come violent scenes between Baron von Harder and his wife, scenes in which each accused the other of extravagance, while the common prodigal outlay

went on unchecked. The half grown-up daughter was too often a witness of these altercations. At once spoiled and neglected by her parents, who liked to parade the pretty child, but, beyond this, concerned themselves but little about her, she lacked all serious training. Even the events of the last year, her father's death, and the subsequent collapse of their fortunes, had passed over the young girl's head, leaving scarcely a trace behind. Sorrow and pain seemed to have no hold on that sunny, volatile nature.

Sufficient judgment, however, Gabrielle did possess to see that the existent order of things in this parvenu's house was far more fitting and in better taste than that she had known at home, and she frequently tormented her mother with remarks on the subject.

The Baroness was sitting on the little sofa in her boudoir, turning over the leaves of a fashion-book. A great reception was to be held at the Castle in the course of the next few days. The highly important question of what dresses should be worn was now awaiting decision, and both mother and daughter were zealously applying themselves to the study which had such attraction for at least one of them.

"Mamma," said Gabrielle, who was sitting by her mother, holding some stray leaves of the fashion-book, "Uncle Arno declared yesterday that these great parties were a troublesome duty, imposed on him by his position. He does not take the smallest pleasure in them."

The Baroness shrugged her shoulders. "He takes pleasure in nothing but work. I never met with a man who gave himself

so little rest and recreation as my brother-in-law."

"Rest?" repeated Gabrielle. "As if he even knew what it meant, or could endure it if he did know! Quite early in the morning he is sitting at his writing-table, and at midnight I often see a light in his study. Now he is busy in his own bureaux, then in the other departments; after that, he drives out, surveying improvements here and there, and inspecting Heaven knows what! In between these occupations, he receives all sorts of people, listens to reports, issues orders. . . . I really believe he gets through more work himself than all his clerks put together."

"Yes, he was always a restless creature," assented the Baroness. "My sister often assured me that it made her nervous even to think of the unceasing whirl of ac-

tivity in which her husband spent his days."

Gabrielle leaned her head on her hand, and mused a little thoughtfully.

"Mamma," she soon began again, "your sister's married life must have been a very dull and tiresome one."

"Tiresome? What makes you think so?"

"Well, I only mean by what I hear in the Castle. My aunt lived in the right wing, and my uncle in the left. Sometimes he would not go near her rooms for weeks, and she never went to his. He had his own carriages and servants, and she had hers. They each went and came as they liked, without giving each other a thought. It must have been a strange sort of life."

"Oh, you are quite mistaken," replied her mother, who evidently saw nothing

him," declared the Baroness, with a sigh, which, however, did not for a moment interrupt her close examination of a pattern before her. "If I submit to them, I make the sacrifice simply and solely with a view to your future, my child."

Her daughter did not seem particularly moved by this proof of maternal solicitude.

"I was catechised like a little school-girl," she grumbled on. "He worried me so with his questions and cross-questions, that I got quite confused at last, and then he shrugged his shoulders and decreed that I should begin taking lessons again. Take lessons at seventeen! He will have masters out from the town for me, he says; but I shall just tell him point-blank that it is not necessary, and he need not trouble himself about the matter."

The mother looked up from her fashion-
~~books~~

Mr. Hester's wife in nothing of the
 kind. "So you seem to live in a state
 of continual rebellion in your garden, and
 your mother with her best you should
 not be angry with your petness and
 obstinacy. So then I must say he has put
 at least our conduct with wonderful
 success. He who could never brook a
 harsher word."

"You are a great deal richer he grew
 angry," said Laurels, firmly. "I
 don't expect him to smile down at me
 with that great delight as if I were too
 insignificant a child to annoy or aggravate
 him. He invariably does smile in that way
 when I attempt it—and when he is so
 gracious as to kiss my forehead, I feel as if
 I should like to run away from the place."

"Gabrielle, I do beg of you——"

"It is of no use, mamma, I can't help it. Whenever I come near Uncle Arno, I have a feeling as though I must defend myself, defend myself with `all my might and main against something—something there is about him. I don't know what it is, but it worries and vexes me. I cannot behave to him as to other people. I cannot, and, what is more, I will not!"

The young lady's last words were uttered in a tone of spirited defiance. She took up her hat and parasol from the table, and prepared to depart.

"Where are you going?" asked her mother.

"Only into the garden for half an hour. It is too hot here in these rooms."

The Baroness protested. She wished

to have the grave question of the toilette settled first, but Gabrielle seemed to have lost all interest in it for that day, and was, besides, too much accustomed to follow the bent of her own caprices even to heed the objection. Next minute she hurried away.

The garden lay at the back of the Castle, and was bounded by its walls on one side, while on the other it stretched away to the edge of the steeply-sloping hill. The high fortification-walls, which had formerly closed it in on this side also, had been taken down, and were now replaced by a low parapet completely clothed in ivy. A full, free view could thus be had of the surrounding country. Below lay the valley, here widening to its fullest breadth, and displaying to the eye of the spectator its picturesque sites and varied beauties. The Castle-



mount was famed for its prospect far and wide. The garden itself still bore traces of those long-bygone times when it had served as pleasance to the mediæval stronghold. Somewhat narrow, somewhat dusky, and very limited in space, it was neither bright with sunshine nor gay with flowers.

One rarer charm, however, it could boast. Majestic, ancient limes shaded its walks, and altogether screened it from view; not even from the Castle windows could it be overlooked. Gravely the great trees stood, considering the younger generation which had sprung up on and about the former ramparts, clustering down the hill-sides, and adorning them with their slender stems and fresh tender green. Those leafy giants, the limes, had struck root in the soil more than a century before ;

their grand old trunks had weathered many a storm, and the mighty branches which formed their crests were interwoven in one vast thick canopy, through which but few sunbeams pierced their way.

The whole space beneath lay in broad, deep shade. Hardly a flower throve in this dim retreat, but under foot was a pleasant stretch of lawn dotted here and there by clumps of bushes, from the midst of which came the low splash and murmur of a fountain. This fountain was in the taste of the last century, and ornamented with old weather-beaten statues, representing, in fantastic fashion, sprites and water-nymphs. Dark, damp moss covered their stony heads and arms supporting shells, from each of which a bright jet of water shot aloft, to fall in a million diamond-drops into the great basin below. Here, too, the

grey stones were carpeted with a close mossy velvet which gave a singularly deep colouring to the crystal-clear water. The Nixies' Well, as it was called from the figures which adorned it, dated from the Castle's earliest times, and still played a certain rôle in the traditions of the countryside.

An old legend had attributed some healing power to the spring, and, notwithstanding the fact that the old mountain-fortress had been transformed into a most prosaic official residence, a superstitious belief in that legend was still firmly rooted in the mind of the people. Water was fetched thence on certain days of the year, and employed as a preventive against sickness and as a remedy in various ailments, to the supreme disgust of the Governor, who had done his best on

several occasions to put an end to the folly. He had even ordered the Castle-garden, which had hitherto been accessible to the public, to be closed, and forbidden the admittance to it of any stranger. This prohibition, however, had a contrary effect to that desired. The people adhered obstinately to their superstition, and clung more tenaciously than ever to the object of it. The servants of the household were moved by prayers, or bribed by presents, to tolerate in secret that which they dared not openly allow. The Castle-fountain retained its old reputation, and its waters were venerated as almost holy, though, to be sure, the divinities to whom it had been consecrated were pagan enough in their outward semblance.

Gabrielle too had heard of these things, ~~had~~ heard of them from the Baron him-

self, who frequently alluded to the subject with angry ridicule ; and it might possibly be that lurking spirit of rebellion against her guardian, so dreaded by her mother, which led the young lady to select this as her favourite spot. To-day again she sought it, but neither the Nixies' Well nor the noble prospect spreading out yonder on the unenclosed side of the garden had power to chain her attention. Gabrielle was out of humour, and she had some cause for discontent. After the boundless liberty she had enjoyed at Z——, the strict formal etiquette of the Government-house galled and irritated her. She could not reconcile herself to it ; the less that this etiquette was an insuperable obstacle to the frequent meetings with George Winterfeld on which she had counted.

Here in R——, the young people were

completely separated. With the exception of a chance encounter now and again, always in the presence of witnesses, they were fain to content themselves with a casual glimpse of each other at a distance, with some little secret signal, as when George would pass beneath the window and furtively wave his hand to a slender, white-robed figure above. He had attempted to approach her. His previous acquaintance with them justifying the step, he had paid a visit to the ladies. The Baroness would have had no objection to receive the agreeable young man, as she had received him previously, but Raven gave her very decidedly to understand that he did not desire anything like intimacy between the ladies of his family and one of his young clerks who could have no claim to such a distinction. So the visit

was accepted, but no invitation to repeat it was given, and thus the attempt proved abortive.

True, it was impatience, rather than actual trouble of mind, which made Gabrielle rebel against the constraint everywhere surrounding her. Since the Baron had so calmly deposed her to the rank of a child, she had missed George's tender and yet passionate homage, which formerly she had accepted as a thing of course. *He* never thought her education deficient and neglected, *he* never catechised her, or expected her to take wearisome lessons, as did her guardian, who clearly did not know how young ladies of her age ought to be treated. In George's estimation she was faultless; the one woman to be adored; he was happy when she just blew a kiss to him from afar. . . . And yet she

was angry with George too. Why did he not try more to break through the barriers which separated them? Why did he remain at so respectful a distance? Why, at least, did he not write to her? The young girl was too childish and inexperienced to do justice to that feeling of delicate consideration which made her lover shrink from anything likely to cast the least shadow on her, which made him endure silence and separation rather than venture on any step that might imperil her good name.

“Well, Gabrielle, are you trying to fathom the secrets of the Nixies’ Well?” said a voice, suddenly.

She looked quickly round. Baron von Raven stood before her—he must just have stepped out from among the bushes. It was a most unusual thing for him to set

foot in the garden ; he had neither time nor inclination for solitary walks. Some special motive must have brought him here to-day, for he went straight up to the fountain, and began to examine it carefully on every side.

“ Well, Uncle Arno, I should think you ought to be better acquainted with the secrets than I am,” retorted Gabrielle, laughing. “ I am still a stranger in the land, and you have lived at the Castle ever so long.”

“ Do you think I have had time to listen to these nursery-tales ?”

The contemptuous tone in which he spoke jarred on the girl, she hardly knew why. “ Did you never care for such nursery-tales, not even as a boy ?”

“ Not even as a boy. I had something better to think of even then.”

Gabrielle looked up at him. That proud, stern face, with its expression of sombre earnest, certainly did not give the idea that its owner could ever have known or cared for the fairy world of youth.

"Nevertheless, my visit to-day is to the Nixies' Well," he went on. "I have given orders to have the fountain pulled down and the spring stopped; but I wanted to see first how it was likely to affect the ground, and what precautions should be taken."

Gabrielle turned upon him in alarm and indignation.

"The fountain is to be destroyed? Why?"

"Because I am tired at length of all the folly connected with it. The absurd superstition is not to be uprooted. In spite of my strict orders to the contrary, water is

constantly being fetched from the well, and thus the preposterous delusion is kept alive. It is high time to put an end to it, and that can only be accomplished by doing away with the object to which the superstition clings. I am sorry that one of the Castle's notable old curiosities should have to fall a sacrifice—but no matter, the sacrifice must be made.”

“But you will be robbing the garden of its chief ornament,” cried Gabrielle. “It is the sparkle and murmur of the fountain which gives to the place its greatest charm. And that silver-clear water is to be driven down into the earth? It is a shame, Uncle Arno, and I won't see it done.”

Raven, who was still busy closely inspecting the fountain, turned his head slowly towards her.

“You won’t see it done?” he asked looking at her sharply, but not with the threatening imperious frown wherewith he was accustomed to crush contradiction in the bud; there was even the faintest flicker of a smile about his lips. “Then, of course, I shall have no alternative but to recall the order I have given . . . it would be the first time such a thing ever happened to me! Do you really suppose, child, that I shall give up a resolve of mine in deference to your romantic fancies?”

Again there came that superior, half-derisive, half-pitying smile which Gabrielle hated, and the word ‘child’ which was equally abhorrent to her. Deeply wounded in her dignity as a maiden of seventeen, she preferred to make no answer, but contented herself with casting

at her guardian a look eloquent with indignation.

"You are behaving as though the demolition of the fountain were a personal affront to yourself," said the Baron. "I see you still preserve your childish respect for the old hobgoblin stories, and are in right earnest afraid of the nixies and the phantom-folk."

"I wish the nixies would avenge the contempt now shown them and the intended destruction of their home," said Gabrielle, in a tone which was meant to be playful, but which vibrated with real anger. "The chastisement would not fall on me."

"But on me, you think," said Raven, sarcastically. "No, no; make your mind easy, child. It is only your poetic, moonlight natures which are exposed to these

things. The nixies' charm would utter fail if tried on me."

They were standing close to the fountain's edge. The water fell with a monotonous splash and ripple out of the stone shells down into the basin below. Suddenly a breezy gust diverted the course of the jet, dashing its spray in a sparkling shower at once over the Baron and Gabrielle. The girl sprang back with a cry. Raven stood quietly where he was.

"That caught us both," said he. "The nixies seem to be impartial in their favour. They stretch forth their dripping arms to friend and foe alike."

Gabrielle had retreated to the garden seat, and was busy wiping the glittering drops from her dress with her handkerchief. His raillery irritated her beyond a

telling, and yet she hardly knew what answer to make. Had any one else so spoken to her, she would have found some gay repartee, would have turned the accident into a joke, and made it a pretext for merry banter. But now she could not do this. The Baron's jests were always caustic. It was irony at most which now and then gleamed in his face, and caused the wonted gravity of his features to relax.

With a rapid movement he shook off the drops wherewith he too was plentifully besprinkled, and drew near the garden-seat in his turn, adding :

"I am sorry to have to spoil your favourite spot, but, as regards the fountain, the edict has gone forth. You will have to make the best of it."

Gabrielle cast a sorrowful look at the

shining, falling water. Its dreamy murmur had possessed a mysterious attraction for her from the very first day. She was almost ready to cry, as she answered :

“ I know you do not care how your orders vex and distress other people, and that it is quite useless for me to ask a favour of you. You never listen to petitions of any sort.”

Raven crossed his arms quietly and looked down at her.

“ Ah ! you have found that out already ?”

“ Yes, and nobody ever thinks of coming to you with one. They are all afraid of you—the servants, your clerks, mamma even—every one but me.”

“ You are not afraid ?”

“ No !”

The answer came boldly and resolutely

from the young lady's lips. She seemed to have reassumed her warlike attitude, and to have determined this time on exasperating the dreaded guardian—but in vain. He remained perfectly calm, and appeared rather amused than offended at his ward's spirit of contradiction.

“It is fortunate your mother is not here,” he remarked. “She would be a prey to the keenest anxiety, and quite despair of the perverse young head which will not bend to necessity as she herself does with admirable self-abnegation. You should take example by her.”

“Oh, yes! mamma is docility itself where you are concerned,” cried Gabrielle, growing more and more excited; “and she expects the same from me. But I will not play the hypocrite, and I cannot like you, Uncle Arno, for you are not good to

us, and never have been good to us. Your very reception of us when we came was so humiliating that I should have been glad to go away again at once ; and since then you have daily and hourly let us feel that we are dependent on you. You treat my mother with a disrespect which often makes me go hot with indignation. You speak in a slighting way of my papa, who is dead and cannot defend himself, and you behave to me as though I were a sort of toy not to be thought of seriously. You have taken us in, and we live in your Castle, where everything is much grander and finer than in my own home, but I would far rather be away in our Swiss exile, as mamma calls it—in our little house by the lake, which was so simple and modest, where we had barely what was necessary, but where, at least, we were

free from you and your tyranny. Mamma insists on it I must bear it, because you are rich, and because my future depends on your favour. But I do not want your money; I do not care about being your heiress. I should like to go away from here; the sooner the better!"

She had sprung up from her seat and stood facing him, glowing with passionate excitement, one little foot firmly planted in advance, her head thrown back, her eyes brimming with tears of anger and of mortification; but there was more in this stormy outbreak than the mere defiance of a wayward child. Every word betrayed intense and deeply-wounded feelings; and there was, indeed, but too much truth in the accusation she thus boldly launched at her guardian.

Raven had uttered no syllable of inter-

ruption. He had stood immovable, his gaze riveted on her face ; but now, as she ceased speaking, and, drawing a long breath, pressed her hands on her bosom, while a torrent of hot tears burst from her eyes, he stooped down suddenly and said with great earnestness :

“Do not cry, Gabrielle. To you, at least, I have been unjust. I own it.”

Gabrielle's tears were stayed. Now only, as reflection succeeded to excitement, did she realise all the imprudence of her words. She had surely counted on an outbreak of swift, fierce wrath ; and, in its stead, there met her this inexplicable calm. She stood, mute and almost abashed, looking to the ground.

“So you do not want my money ?” went on the Baron. “How do you know what

my intention may be with regard to it? I have never made any communication to you on the subject, to my knowledge; yet the topic would appear to have been well discussed between you and your mother."

The young girl flushed crimson.

"I do not know . . . we never——"

"Do not attempt to deny it, child. You are as little versed in falsehood as in mercenary calculation, or you would never have adopted such an attitude towards me. I am not angry with you for it. I can forgive open defiance. Hypocrisy and systematic scheming I could not have forgiven you at your age. Thank God, the faulty education has not done so much harm as I feared."

He took her hand quietly, as though nothing unusual had happened, drew her

down on to the bench, and seated him by her.

Gabrielle made a little attempt to move away from him.

"Stay! you must allow me to meet your declaration of war with an answer in due form," said the Baron. "Your mother will not share in the hostilities; at least, not openly. I am sure she has enjoined it on you as a duty to be amiable and gracious in your manner towards the *parvenu*."

"What do you mean?" asked the girl, in confusion.

"Well, the term cannot be unfamiliar to you. It was, I believe, the special designation accorded to me in your father's house."

This time Gabrielle bravely met the look which rested on her face.

"I know my parents had no love for you," she answered. "How could they?"

You had never been anything but hostile to them."

"I to them, or they to me? but no matter, it comes to the same. These are things whereof you, Gabrielle, are not yet qualified to judge. You have no notion what it is for a man holding an inferior position, such as mine then was, to enter an eminently aristocratic family and the high social sphere in which that family moved. In those circles I had then, and have had since, but one friend, your grandfather. With every one else I had to win my place by force of conquest; and there are but two ways to this end. Either the aspirant must bow his head and meekly submit to all such humiliations as are showered on a *parvenu*—he must either show himself deeply sensible of the honour conferred on him and content himself with being

tolerated—and to this my nature was suited—or he must boldly usurp the master's place, assert an authority over the whole clique, show them there is a power mightier than that of their genealogies, and set his heel on all their prejudices and arrogant pretensions. Then *they* learn to bow before him. As a rule, it is far easier to govern and keep men under than is generally supposed. You must know how to overawe them. Therein lies the whole secret of success."

Gabrielle shook her head slightly.

"These are hard principles."

"They result from my experience of the world, and I have thirty years' advantage over you in this respect. Do you think I never had my grand ideals, my dreams, and my enthusiasm? Do you think my heart was never fired with all the ardent



imaginings of youth? But these things die out as we advance in life. I could not carry my dreams with me into such a career as mine. They hold you to the ground; it was my wish to mount, and I have mounted. Truly, I had to pay a high price for my chance—too high a price, perhaps; but no matter, I have attained my end.”

“And has it made you happy?” The question came almost involuntarily from the young girl’s lips.

Raven shrugged his shoulders.

“Happy? Life is a struggle, not a state of beatitude. One must throw one’s adversary, or be thrown—there is no third issue. You, indeed, look on all this with other eyes as yet. To you, life is still one long summer day, bright as the light shining out yonder. You still believe that

far away in the glistening distance, over those blue mountains, there lies a paradise of joy and content. You are mistaken, child. The golden sun shines down on endless sorrow and misery, and over beyond the blue mountains is nothing but the toilsome road from the cradle to the grave, the long route we diversify with so much strife and hatred. Life is only one great battle to be fought every day afresh : men are but puppets to be governed — and despised."

There was an indescribable hardness and harshness in his words, but there was in them also all the decision and energy proper to the man. He was enouncing a dogma which had become to him indisputable. The bitterness of spirit pervading his profession of faith escaped, indeed, in a great measure his girlish hearer, who

listened half amazed, half indignant—
listened and wondered.

“ But, finally, there comes a time when the everlasting combat sickens,” Raven went on ; “ when a man comes to ask himself whether, after all, the once dreamed-of greatness were worth the stake of all he possessed, when he counts the sum of victories achieved by constant wrestling and unremitting exertions, and, counting them, grows heartily weary of the game he has played so long. I am weary of it often—very weary !”

He leaned back, and gazed out into the distance. There was gloomy care in his look, and the deep weariness of which he spoke re-echoed in his voice. Gabrielle was silent, greatly embarrassed by the serious turn the conversation had taken, and feeling herself led away into quite un-

known paths. Hitherto she had seen in her guardian the master only—the master, iron of will and inaccessible to sentiment. His behaviour towards herself had been marked by the mere indulgent condescension with which a man stoops to a child's range of ideas. He had never spoken to her in any but the half-kindly, half-jesting manner he had assumed to-day on first meeting her.

For the first time this taciturn, rigidly reserved nature expanded in a moment of self-forgetfulness. Gabrielle looked down into a depth whereof she had not dreamed ; but instinctively she felt that she must not move, must not conjure up the strong emotions stirring below the surface.

A long pause followed. The two looked out silently at the broad landscape lying before them in the warm light of a mellow

August day. The month had nearly run its course, and summer seemed before her departure to be shedding all her bountiful stores of loveliness over the earth. Resplendent sunshine streamed over the ancient city spread at the foot of the Castle-hill, flooded the pasture-lands and fields, gleamed on the hamlets which dotted the country far and near, and sparkled in the ripples of the river winding its way majestically through the valley.

Enclosing this valley stood the circling hills, some with softly modulated lines, some rising boldly, jagged and rugged, with their stretches of green meadow and dark patches of forest, out from which, here and there, a pilgrim's shrine shone whitely, or a ruined fortress, grey with age, reared its crumbling walls. In the far distance, half veiled in blue mist, rose the



grander mountains, a noble background bounding the horizon, and over all the azure sky smiled serene and gracious, and the great sea of ether was filled with a golden haze. It was one of those days when the earth lies bathed in light, so saturated with warmth and brilliant in beauty, that it would seem as though the world's wide compass held nought else than sunshine, glorious sunshine.

No stronger contrast could have been found than this beaming landscape without, and the deep cool shade of the Castle-garden, buried in its sombre quiet. The mighty crests of the limes, with their closely-woven boughs, shed a sort of mild green twilight on the space below, and from beneath the tall trees came the monotonous splash of the fountain. In unvarying alternation the crystal column rose on high,



splintered into a thousand fragments, and sank to earth again. Occasionally a ray of light, straying into this retired nook, would strike the falling spray, transforming it into a shower of diamonds, but next moment the glory was gone. All lay in cool shadow again, and through the misty veil of water the grey figures of the sirens, with their long serpent hair and stony features, looked spectrally forth.

The still, sultry noon seemed to have hushed all Nature into dreamy repose. Not a bird fluttered, not a leaf stirred; from the Nixies' Well alone came a mysterious murmur, breaking the deep stillness. Thus from time immemorial had the spring rippled and babbled here on the Castle-hill; for more than a century now, clad in the stone vesture into which it had been forced, had this faithful companion fulfilled its

duty, quickening the solitude, enlivening the sequestered retreat of the Castle-garden. Over its head had swept all the hurricanes which the old fortress had braved of yore, the hurricanes of war, the stormy, violent times of battle and strife, of victory and defeat. Following on these had come a period of splendour and greatness, during which the ancient stronghold had disappeared, and in its place a princely mansion had arisen. All this the ever-flowing fount had witnessed. Historic events had befallen ; generations had come and gone—until, at length, a new era had dawned, the era of modern progress, changing, modifying, ordering all afresh. To this puissant influence everything had yielded—save only and except the sacred spring, fenced around by a rampart of legend and superstition. But now its turn,



too, had come. The old statues, which had so long protectingly surrounded it, were to fall, and the bubbling water was to be driven from the cheery light of day down into the dark earth beneath, there to be held captive for evermore.

Were its import a complaint, or a tale of whispered memories, that dreamy murmur exercised a strange fascination over the grave, unbending man, who had never known the musings of solitude or its poetic inspirations, and over the youthful blooming maiden at his side, who with laughing lips and a merry heart had, hitherto, fluttered joyously on her course, unheeding, ignorant of life's earnest. All the fierce wrestling and striving on the one hand, all the happy childish fancies on the other, were resolved, as it were, into some nameless strange sensation, half sweet, half troubled,



which held the two in thralldom. So, as they sat listening to the ripple and purl of the water, unvarying, and yet so melodious, the outer world with its shining vistas and wealth of golden warmth receded farther and farther from view, until at length it vanished altogether. Then dim shadows grew up round the pair, a cool watery film gathered round them, and they were drawn down, down into vague mysterious depths, where no sound of life penetrated, where all battling and fierce longing, all happiness and sorrow, died away into one deep, deep dream; and through their dreaming, as from some immeasurable distance, they could still hear the faint spirit-singing of the spring.

In the city below the bells rang out the noonday hour. The clear resonant chimes were borne up to the Castle-hill, and at



their sound all the strange fantasies evoked by the eerie murmur of the water melted away. Raven looked up as though he had been suddenly, roughly awakened, and Gabrielle rose quickly, and, with a movement almost akin to flight, hurried to the ivy-kirtled parapet, where, bending forwards, she stood listening to the distant carillon. The sound came distinctly to her through the still air, as on that day by the lake-shore when she and George . . . Gabrielle did not follow out the thought. Why did George's name force itself all at once on her memory, striking her as with a reproach? Why did his image suddenly appear before her—that resolute face which seemed to say it would guard and maintain his rights? On that last occasion, when, in a laughing, jesting humour, she had taken leave of him, the bells had said

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“Well, the fountain has now lived its life. To-morrow, perhaps, by your command, the garden will have been turned into a wilderness, a chaos of stones and earth, and . . .”

“Little do I care whether my orders distress other people or not?” completed Raven, as she paused. “It may be so—but, Gabrielle, are you really so fond of this spring? Would it positively distress you to see it stopped?”

“Yes,” said Gabrielle, in a low voice, looking up at him. Her lips uttered no word of entreaty; but her eyes besought him earnestly, pleading for the doomed fountain.

Raven was silent. For some minutes he stood by her without speaking. Then he began again :

nothing to her. To-day, at the remembrance of them, a quick sharp pang s through her, a warning, as it were, again to let herself be enticed out of bright familiar sunshine into unknown depths, a hint of some dimly-foreseen danger, now weaving its meshes round her. She was seized by a vague, uncountable alarm. The Baron had risen too. He came up to where she stood.

"You have taken flight?" he asked slowly. "From what? From me, perhaps?"

Gabrielle tried to smile, and to mask the uneasiness which possessed her, as she replied:

"From the murmur of the Nixies' W. It has such a weird, ghostly sound at this noontide hour."

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“I frightened you just now with my harsh views of life, but no one says you must share them. I forgot for a moment that youth has a right to dream, and that it would be cruel to rob you of the privilege. Keep your faith still in the golden far-off future, in the promise of the blue mountains. You may yet put gentle confidence in the world and in mankind ; it is little likely you will ever incur their hostility and hatred.”

His voice was veiled and wonderfully soft, and all austerity had vanished from his look, as it rested half sadly on the young girl's countenance ; but Arno Raven was not one to be long influenced by such emotions ; and, indeed, it seemed that no chance of yielding to them was to be afforded him, for at this moment steps were heard approaching, and, as they turned, the

lodge-keeper, accompanied by an elderly man — a mechanic, apparently — entered the garden. They stopped on perceiving the Governor, and uncovered respectfully.

Raven's mildness had already vanished. He had quickly shaken off the unwonted mood.

"What is it?" he asked, in the curt, authoritative tone habitual to him.

"Your Excellency has given orders that the Nixies' Well should be broken up, and the spring stopped," answered the master-mason. "It was to be done to-day, and my men will be here in half an hour or so. I only wanted to see beforehand whether there would be any difficulty, and if the work was likely to take up much time."

The Baron glanced at the fountain, and

then at Gabrielle standing by his side. There was the hardly perceptible delay of a second, and then he pronounced his decree :

“Send your people away. The work is not to be done.”

“What! your Excellency?” asked the mason, in astonishment.

“The demolition of the fountain would injure the garden. It is to remain. I will take other measures.”

A wave of the hand dismissed the two men. They, of course, ventured on no reply, but surprise was plainly written on their countenances as they left the garden. It was the first time an order so circumstantially given by the Governor himself had ever been withdrawn.

Raven had stepped to the edge of the

basin, and was watching the constant falling shower. Gabrielle had remained in her place by the parapet, but now she drew near slowly, hesitatingly—presently, with a sudden movement, she held out both hands to him.

“ Thank you—oh, thank you.”

He smiled, not with his usual sardonic smile. A ray of sunshine seemed to flit across his face, as he took the offered hands, and, gently raising Gabrielle’s head, stooped to kiss her brow.

There was nothing unusual in this. He was in the habit of thus saluting her when she appeared at breakfast and wished him “ Good-morning,” and hitherto she had received his caress most unconcernedly ; while he, her guardian, had but in cool, grave fashion made use of his ‘ fatherly rights.’

To-day, for the first time, the young girl involuntarily sought to evade it; and Raven felt that the hand he held in his own trembled a little. He drew himself up suddenly, without having touched her forehead with his lips, and dropped her hand.

"You are right," he said, in a troubled voice. "There is a magic in the Nixies' Well. Let us go."

They turned away. Behind them the spring babbled and murmured, the fountain plashed, throwing its white veil of spray ever on high. That cruel doom of destruction was averted now. The beseeching prayer of those brown eyes, and the glittering tears which stood in them, had saved the well.

Perhaps at this moment the cold, stern man, who had long passed the prime

of life, may have felt that his boast had been premature, that not even he in his strength was entirely proof against 'the nixies' charm.'



CHAPTER V.



GEORGE WINTERFELD sat at his writing-table in his own room. He looked worn, and almost ill. The transient freshness of tint called up by his holiday excursion had long since vanished, and the natural pallor, which had even then been noticeable on the young man's finely cut and intellectual features, had visibly increased. He was, indeed, apt to exact too much of his working powers. The duties of his

position made considerable demands on his time, yet in every leisure-hour at his disposal he devoted himself with feverish zeal to such studies as were likely to advance him in his career.

George often worked at the expense of his health ; he was urged on by a nobler spur than ambition. Every step he took forward lessened the gap between himself and the woman he loved, and, though possessed of all becoming modesty, he was yet too sensible of his own abilities and his own worth not to cherish an assured hope that one day that gap would be filled up.

His colleagues, who for the most part contented themselves with getting through the business which fell to them in office-hours, knew nothing of the Assessor's quiet, unceasing toil. He never alluded to

it. The chief's penetrating eye alone had discovered with what a fund of perseverance, with what genuine talent the young clerk was gifted, though as yet he had had but small opportunity of turning his gifts to active account.

George always worked best in the morning hours. He was sitting to-day bent over a volume of jurisprudence, and so immersed in its arid contents that he did not notice the opening of the outer door which gave access to his apartments. It was only when he heard a familiar voice say : " Don't trouble yourself. I can find my way to Mr. Winterfeld alone," that he started up from his book, just as the new-comer entered.

" Good-morning, George, old fellow. Here I am, you see."

" Max ! Is it possible ? What brings

you to R——? How did you come here?" cried George, in joyful surprise, hurrying to meet his friend.

"I came straight from home," replied the latter, returning his friend's greeting with equal heartiness. "I only reached the hotel half an hour ago, and came up to see you immediately."

"But why not write me a few lines? Did you wish to take me by surprise?"

"No, not that; the journey was rather a surprise to myself; for, my dear fellow, I am not brought here by any sentimental feelings of friendship, as you may possibly flatter yourself, but by a most real and practical matter of business, arising from our succession to some property. But, in the first place, how are you? You are looking pale, as is but natural to a man who sits brooding in the early morning over

his books. George, you are incorrigible."

George laughed, pushed away the hand that was stretched out to feel his pulse, and drew his friend to the sofa.

"Lay aside the doctor for the nonce," said he. "I am perfectly well. So it is some succession-business which brings you here. Have riches peradventure overtaken you?"

"Not riches, exactly," said Max. "It is only a matter of a very modest fortune left by a cousin of ours who owned a small estate in the neighbourhood of R——. I had some acquaintance with him. He had quarrelled with my father out and out, on account of the latter's political past; but now he has died without a will or direct heirs, and my father, as next of kin, has received a summons from the R——

tribunal to make good his claims. This he cannot do in person. You know that he may not set foot in his native land without risking a return to his old quarters in that fortified place which he quitted by the somewhat unusual conveyance of a ladder of ropes. The sentence formerly pronounced on him still hangs over his head, so he has sent me as his representative."

"You have full authority to act?" put in the Assessor.

"Unlimited ; but there will be plenty of quibbles and delays, notwithstanding. My father's flight and protracted absence will complicate matters, and my notorious socialist name will hardly predispose the judicial mind to any special affability towards me. Foreseeing all this, I have taken a rather long leave, and I intend to

stay in R—— until the business is settled. I count much on your legal advice and assistance."

"I am altogether at your service. The first thing for you to do, however, is to give up your rooms at the hotel, and to come here to me."

"With your permission, I shall decline doing that," said Max, dryly.

"Why?"

"Because I don't wish to bring you into trouble with your superiors. Can you give me your word of honour that the visit you paid us this summer passed unremarked, that it has called down on you no word of blame?"

George looked down.

"Well, I certainly was favoured with some rather sharp observations on the subject from the chief; but there are

bounds even to his jurisdiction and to the regard I owe to my position. I do not mean to offer up to it my friends and private connections."

"You need not do so," returned the young surgeon; "but there is no occasion to go out of your way to challenge a conflict. You know I have not a very high opinion of gratuitous sacrifices, and the invitation you are now so kind as to give me comes under that head. No use to argue, George. I shall remain at the hotel. You will compromise yourself quite sufficiently in the eyes of all loyal citizens by owning me as a friend at all."

The refusal was expressed in so decided a tone that George saw it would be useless to insist; so he yielded the point.

"Well, let me congratulate you on coming in to the fortune, at all events," he

said. "Though it be not a very considerable one, it will, I suppose, be of importance to you."

"Certainly ; I am especially glad on my father's account. He can now devote himself to his beloved science undisturbed by those material cares which have hitherto held the front rank. I, too, gain by it my much-desired independence. I should long ago have resigned my post at the hospital, had it not been necessary to provide for our household an assured income which can henceforth be dispensed with. I shall set to work to establish a practice now, and marry."

"You are thinking of marrying ?" asked George, in some astonishment.

"Of course I am. A man must have a wife. It is necessary to his comfort."

"But whom do you mean to marry ?"



"Ah! that I don't know yet. When I have installed myself in a place of my own, I shall hold a review, make my choice, and lead home my bride."

"Some daughter of Switzerland, I presume."

"Beyond a doubt. I think very highly of the solid good sense and practical virtues of the Swiss, though it may be there is a little lack of polish about them at times. Moreover I don't want any tender over-refinement in my wife. Married people should be cut out on the same pattern."

"Well, you seem to have gone thoroughly into it," laughed George. "I dare say you have made out a regular Programme, enumerating all the qualities your future wife is to possess. So let us hear. Clause No. 1?"

“Money,” said Max, laconically. “Ah! yes; that rouses your sentimental feelings to revolt again. Money is indispensable. Second desideratum, practical domestic education. Third, fine robust health. A doctor, who is knocking about all day among all sorts of maladies, does not want to have to prescribe at home. Fourth——”

“For Heaven’s sake, stop!” interrupted his friend. “I believe there are a dozen *sine quâ non*. Love does not figure among them, I suppose?”

“Love comes after marriage,” replied the young surgeon, confidently—“at least with rational people; and the unions which answer best are those based on the solid grounds of reason and common sense. When, after a mature consideration of character and circumstances, I find that my programme fits, I shall make my offer at

once, and get married ; and therewith all is said."

George smiled rather sadly as he laid his hand on his friend's arm.

"My dear Max, I know very well for whom your sermon is intended. Unfortunately, it can avail nothing. You will not understand this until some passion, springing up in your own breast, dashes through all your clauses at a stroke, and upsets your conclusions."

"A minute, please. Mine is no romantic nature. I leave romance to certain other people of my acquaintance. By-the-bye, how is your little affair progressing ? May I expect again to fill the part of confidant, and, when occasion offers, to resume my former functions as sentinel ? I am at your orders."

George sighed.

"No, Max, there is no question of that. I hardly ever see Gabrielle, and have only spoken to her once in her mother's presence. The Governor has built up around his house such a rampart of haughty reserve and exclusiveness, it is impossible to break through it."

"Poor old fellow! the melancholy of your appearance becomes explicable to me. Well, you see the consequences of taking these things too seriously. My programme and my clauses, at which you jeer in a most uncalled-for manner, protect me from such misadventures."

George looked at his watch.

"Excuse me, I must be off to the Chancellery. Our office-hours begin early; but after three o'clock I am at liberty, and I will look you up immediately. Shall I go with you to the hotel?"

The young surgeon preferred to bear his friend company on his way to the bureau, so the two set out together. They walked through the streets, chatting as they went, and at the foot of the hill they came upon Councillor Moser. This gentleman had his quarters at the Government-house itself, but he was in the habit of taking a constitutional in the morning before office-hours commenced, and from this exercise he was now returning. He advanced slowly with his usual stiff and solemn mien, his chin well buried in his white cravat, and returned his subordinate's greeting with an affable but dignified bow.

"You are looking tired, Mr. Winterfeld," he observed in a benevolent tone. "His Excellency himself has noticed it. His Excellency is of opinion that you work

too sedulously, and that you will undermine your health by such assiduous study. There may be too much even of a good thing. You should not apply too closely."

"That is what I am always preaching to my friend," put in Max; "but in vain. This very morning, at an untimely hour, I found him poring over his books, and had literally to hunt him from them. He throws all my prescriptions to the wind."

"You are a member of the Faculty, sir?" asked the Councillor, evidently expecting that this stranger should be presented to him.

"My friend Dr. Brunnow," said George; "Mr. Councillor Moser."

The chief-clerk suddenly rose out from the depths of his white neckcloth.

"Brunnow—Brunnow?" he repeated.



"Is the name familiar to you, Councillor?" asked Max, innocently.

All benevolence had vanished from the old gentleman's face. It expressed something akin to horror as he replied sharply:

"The name was well known in former times, first in connection with the rebellion, then with the courts of justice. Finally, it was brought into people's mouths by the escape from a fortified place of a political prisoner who bore it. I trust you stand in no relationship to the Dr. Brunnow to whom I allude."

"In the very closest," said the young surgeon, with a most polite bow. "That Dr. Brunnow is my father."

The Councillor recoiled a step, as though to guarantee himself against any chance contact. Then he turned his back on the

young man, and concentrated all his ire and indignation on George.

“Mr. Assessor Winterfeld,” he began in a withering tone, “there are officials, clever and competent officials even, who do not, or will not, recognise the first and most sacred duty imposed on them by their service, the duty of loyalty to the State. Are you acquainted with any such?”

George was a little embarrassed.

“I really do not quite understand your drift——”

“Well, I am acquainted with some of that order, and I pity them, for they are, in general, but the victims of false teaching and evil example.”

The young clerk frowned. He was, it is true, pretty well accustomed to such philippics from his superior; but now, in

his friend's presence, he chafed at the implied reproof, feeling the awkwardness of the situation. So he answered with some heat :

"You may feel convinced that I understand my duties. Beyond this——"

"Yes, yes. I am aware that all young men are born reformers, and that they consider it a proof of character to try a little opposition," interrupted Moser, who dearly loved, in season and out of season, to make use of his chief's words, which were to him as so many oracular utterances. "But it is a dangerous game, for opposition leads on to revolution, and revolution"—the chief-clerk shuddered—"is a horrible thing!"

"A most horrible thing, Councillor," said Max, emphatically.

"You think so?" asked Moser, some-

what disconcerted by this unexpected hesitation.

“Certainly: and I think, too, that it well you should make this appeal to your friend’s conscience. I myself have often told him he is not loyal as he should be.”

The Councillor stood as though petrified on hearing these words, which were delivered with imperturbable gravity. He was about to answer, when suddenly his chin disappeared into his cravat again, as he assumed a reverential attitude.

“His Excellency!” said he, under his breath, respectfully taking off his hat.

And, looking round, they really saw the Governor, coming from the Castle, and going on foot towards the town. On reaching the spot where they stood, he returned the gentlemen’s greeting in his customary measured fashion, took a rapid survey

young Brunnow, and then addressed himself to Moser :

“ It is fortunate I meet you, my dear sir. There is something I wish to say to you. Bear me company for a few minutes, will you ?”

The Councillor joined his chief, and the two went on towards the town, while the young men pursued their journey up the hill.

“ So that is your despot, is it ?” asked Max, as soon as they were out of hearing. “ The much-abused, much-dreaded Raven ! He is of an imposing presence, that I must allow him. A bearing and dignity that would not ill become a prince ; and then that lordly glance with which he took my measure ! One can see the man knows how to command.”

“ And how to oppress,” added George,

bitterly. "We have had a fresh proof of it lately. The whole city is in a state of ferment on account of the extraordinary new police regulations he has saddled upon it. He means to repress by force every opposition which is daily growing more active, and now threatens to become really troublesome. This last step of his is a flagrant affront to the whole body of citizens."

"And the good townsfolk of R—— take it quietly?"

George cast a prudent glance around him. The road was clear, and their conversation was safe from curious ears, yet the young man lowered his voice as he answered.

"What can they do? Rebel against their ruler, the chosen delegate of the Government? That would entail most serious consequences. I often think, p



haps all that is wanting is to make our Ministers aware of the true state of the case, to acquaint them with all the arbitrary proceedings, the acts of tyranny whereby their representative has abused the full powers conferred on him. Were this openly done, they must let him fall."

"Or silence the inconvenient monitor instead. It would not be the first time such a thing has happened; and this Raven does not look as if he would easily let himself be thrown. He would, at least, drag down his enemies with him in his fall."

"And yet, sooner or later, it must come to that," said George, resolutely. "A brave man will one day be found."

The young surgeon started, and looked searchingly into his friend's face.

"You will not be he, I should hope. Don't be a fool, George, and enter the lists

alone in behalf of others. It may cost you your position, your living; and, besides, have you forgotten that the Baron is your adored Gabrielle's guardian? If you rouse his anger, he has at his disposal the means of destroying all your hopes of happiness."

"That he will do in any case," returned George, moodily. "He will assuredly try to get his ward married brilliantly and speedily; and when he finds that I am the obstacle to the success of his plans, there are hardly any limits to the antagonism I may expect from him."

"And, most decidedly, he is not one whom it will be easy to fight," remarked Max. "I understand that you hate him in his double capacity."

"Hate? I admire much in him, and in one sense the city and province owe him a debt of gratitude. Thanks to his energy,

numberless new resources have been opened out, dormant powers have been aroused and made to subserve the public good; but every aspiration towards a greater freedom he has stifled with an iron hand. The cruel period of reaction, which has weighed on us so long, is indebted to him for some of its worst triumphs."

"It is coming to an end," observed Max.

"Yes, thank God, it is coming to an end. The old system is shaken to its foundations, and its upholders are endeavouring to trim their course wisely, so as to save all that may yet be saved. Raven alone holds to the past with rigid consistency. Not the smallest concession—not the most trifling compromise can be wrung from him, and he will not listen to the warning voices which sound even in

his ears. Is this wilful blindness, or firmness of character?"

"Firmness of character in a renegade

George looked down thoughtfully. Suddenly he said :

"Max, there are times when I would rather doubt your father's word than ascribe a dishonourable action to my chief. Ambition, passion, might lead him to commit crime ; but base, low treachery to friends ! There is not a trait in the man which does not contradict the charge."

"And yet he was guilty of such treachery. Do you think my father would pass this rigorous judgment on the hero he once worshipped without ample proof ? But, indeed, are they needed ? Is not the career of this Arno Raven proof enough in itself ? He was once an enthusiastic champion of liberty. What is he now ?"

“You are right ; and yet . . . Let us say no more of this. We are at the Castle.”

They had, indeed, by this time reached the Government-house, where they must separate. An appointment was hastily made for the afternoon, then George betook himself to the Chancellery, and Max, who was in no hurry to return to the town, strolled about, inspecting the Castle, which was one of the principal sights of R——, and an object of interest to all strangers. The young surgeon, it is true, cared very little for architectural curiosities or the antique Romantic style of art ; but the Castle interested him on account of its present inhabitants. He sauntered through the galleries and passages as far as they were accessible ; then, turning at length to retrace his steps, he lost his way, and, instead of re-issuing at the main entrance,

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wandered into one of the side wings. He only remarked his error on finding himself in a corridor which evidently led to an inhabited dwelling. Just as he was about to turn and go back, a door opened, and an elderly woman looked out.

"Ah, you are there, Doctor," said she, gladly. "Pray come in. My young lady is ready, and expecting you."

"Expecting me?" asked Max, astonished at the welcome.

"Surely. You are the doctor, are not you?"

"Well, I am that, certainly."

"Come in then, please. I will let the young lady know." Saying which, the woman, apparently a superior sort of housekeeper, vanished, and Max remained alone in the outer room she had constrained him to enter.

"Now this I call luck," said he to himself, under his breath. "I no sooner set foot in R——, than a practice tumbles unexpectedly into my lap. We shall see what course the matter takes."

For this he had not long to wait. After a few minutes the woman came back, and ushered him into a pleasant, comfortably-furnished parlour. A young lady rose from her place by the window, and came towards him.

She was a very young girl, perhaps about sixteen or seventeen years of age, tall and slender, but fragile, almost sickly in appearance. Transparently pale of complexion, her face, though not beautiful, was delicate and prepossessing. Dark shadows encircled her eyes, and there was hardly a trace of colour in the cheeks or lips. Her costume was of almost exaggerated sim-

plicity, and quite conventual in its cut and fashion. The black dress, unrelieved by the slightest ornament, was fastened high in the neck and closely at the wrists. A square of black lace completely covered her head, so that only a narrow band of the smoothly coiled dark hair was to be seen. Very timid and embarrassed in manner, she stood before the physician with downcast eyes, saying not a word.

“You wish for medical advice, Fräulein?” asked Max at length, having waited in vain for her to speak. “I am at your service.”

At the sound of his voice, the girl raised a pair of dark, expressive eyes, but quickly lowered them again, and drew back a step in evident alarm. Even her more mature companion seemed, on closer investigation, somewhat startled and uneasy at the



doctor's youthful appearance. She did not budge an inch from her charge's side.

"My father wishes me to consult a physician," the young lady now made answer, in a low, soft-toned voice. "It is not really necessary, for I do not feel exactly ill."

"But you are right-down ill," interrupted the elder woman, who evidently considered herself more as one of the family than as a domestic. "And now the Councillor says he insists on your seeing some one."

"The Councillor? Councillor Moser?" asked Max, a light breaking in upon him. By a sort of intuition, he guessed to whose house chance had led him.

"Yes. Has he not been with you?"

"He was with me about ten minutes before I came here," declared the young

man, with difficulty repressing a strong inclination to laugh.

He recalled to mind the look of horror with which the worthy Councillor had shrunk from him on hearing his father's name. Under any other circumstances he would at once have cleared up the misunderstanding ; but now he thought of the old gentleman who had treated him so ungraciously ; how wrathful he would be, were he to discover, under his own roof, this scion of socialists and demagogues ! Max determined to stand his ground, come what might.

"You look very far from well, however, Fräulein," he went on, taking her hand, and attentively feeling her pulse. "Will you allow me to put a few questions to you ?"

The examination began. When Max

had a case before him, he became simply and solely the doctor, and forgot all else in his study of its peculiar phenomena. His questions were short, comprehensive, clear. He wasted no words, and never wandered from the subject in hand. Gradually his young patient seemed to gain confidence. She grew more at ease, more explicit in her answers, and ceased looking up anxiously at her protectress each time she spoke. At last the examination came to an end, and Max appeared satisfied with the result.

“I do not see any grounds for serious apprehension. Your ailments are in a great degree nervous, due, perhaps, originally to mental over-excitement, and aggravated by want of air and exercise.”

“That is what I say,” broke in the housekeeper, who was evidently accus-

tomed to put in her oar on every occasion. "Fräulein Agnes takes no exercise ; she never goes out in the open air at all, except in the morning to early mass. I have always said that so much praying and penance and fasting——"

"Christine !" interrupted the young girl, imploringly.

"Yes, yes, the doctor must be told everything," rejoined Christine. "My young lady overdoes it with her piety, Doctor. She is on her knees all day long."

"That is bad ; you must leave that off," said the young surgeon, dictatorially.

Fräulein Agnes looked up at him with a scared expression.

"Doctor !"

"And the daily attendance at early mass as well. That must certainly be discon-

tinued," pursued Max, speaking with the same prompt decision, and unheeding her attempt at remonstrance. "You have every reason to guard against taking cold, and the mornings are beginning to be cool and autumnal. As to fasting, I forbid it once for all. It is as bad as poison to a person in your condition."

"But, Doctor!" said the girl, a second time, and again her protest found no hearing. Max was not to be diverted from his point.

"Now, on the other hand, I prescribe a long walk every day, but at noon when the sun is bright and warm—as much air and exercise as possible, and a little amusement too, something to vary the thoughts. The winter gaieties will be setting in soon. I would advise you not to dance too much."

Agnes started back three steps at thus emulating her father's late retreat.

"Dance!" she repeated, in absolute may. "Dance!"

"Yes, why not? All young ladies fond of dancing, are they not? You not want to be an exception to the rule, I suppose?"

"I have never danced," she replied quickly, and with as much decision of as her soft voice would admit of. "I always kept aloof from worldly amusements. They are sinful, and I shun them."

"Well, well, you should try them before you make up your mind," said the doctor kindly. "But such advice hardly comes within my professional competence. I cannot give you a prescription for the present."



and see you again in the course of a few days. Have you paper and pen and ink at hand ?”

Christine brought the necessary implements, and he sat down to write. Agnes had taken refuge by the window, where she stood with folded palms, and a look of consternation on her pale face. When the prescription was finished, Max came up to her again, and unceremoniously disengaged the folded hands to feel her pulse once more.

“Yes ; now follow my instructions carefully, and there will, I hope, be an improvement before long. Good-morning, Fräulein ?”

So saying, he left the room. Christine closed the entrance-door behind him, and then came back.

“He knows what he is about,” said she.

"He orders and dictates as though no one else had a right to say a word here. What do you think of the doctor, Fräulein?"

"I think him very irreligious," declared the young lady, emphatically.

"Ah, yes; none of your medical men are over-pious," remarked Christine.

"And so young!" went on Agnes, in a tone which implied the weightiest accusation.

"I expected to see an older man myself, but he looks clever, and he certainly is very punctual. He had promised to be here at nine, and on the stroke of nine there he was outside in the corridor. I can't think where your papa is! Something must have happened to detain him, for he wished to be present at the interview."

"The doctor said he had spoken to my

father. Do you think I ought to take the medicine, Christine?"

"Of course you must take it. That is what we had the doctor here for. I like him, in spite of that bearish way of his. You mind what I say, Miss Agnes—he will set you all to rights again."

It remained doubtful whether Agnes herself shared this opinion. She had taken up the prescription, and was reading it. After a while she laid the paper down, and said with a little shake of the head:

"I only wish he were not so irreligious!"

Max, going down the steps, met an elderly gentleman coming up. This personage wore gold spectacles, carried a stick with a gold knob, and had about him an air of great importance. The young surgeon stopped, and looked after him.

"I would wager my head that is my

worthy colleague on his way to pay a promised visit. Now he will rack his brains to discover who can have been interfering with his practice, and snapp up a patient before his very nose. And then the wrath of that quintessence of loyalty, the solemn old Councillor, when he hears the story, and sees my name on the prescription! It would be worth something to get a look at his face. I wish I could introduce myself to him in my new capacity as his family doctor."

The mischievous wish was to be fulfilled. At the foot of the Castle-hill Max met the Councillor, who, as in duty bound, had accompanied 'his Excellency' to his destination, and was now on his road back. No sooner did he catch a glimpse of Brunnow, that 'scion of socialists and demagogues,' than he endeavoured



turn aside, and thus avoid the undesirable meeting. Max, however, went straight up to him.

"I am glad to have the chance of speaking to you again, Councillor. I have just come from your daughter."

This time the old gentleman's face emerged most suddenly from the folds of his white cravat.

"From my daughter?" he repeated.

"Yes, from Fräulein Moser. I can give you the comforting assurance that the young lady's condition need inspire no serious apprehension, though she will require great care and attention. The nervous system is out of order, certainly, but——"

"Sir, allow me to ask how you came to see my daughter?" vociferated the Councillor.

"But this will yield to proper treatment," continued Max, quite undisturbed. "For the present I have prescribed a remedy from which I hope the best results, and in a few days I will call in and see the young lady again."

"But I never asked for your attendance," protested the Councillor, whose head was in a whirl. He could make nothing of the other's astounding communication.

"Excuse me, I was called in. Ask Frau Christine. As I said before, I hope great things from the medicine, and I will look in again the day after to-morrow. No thanks, pray, Councillor; it affords me the greatest pleasure. My compliments to your daughter. Good-morning."

Councillor Moser stood for some seconds rigid and motionless as a statue; then he charged at full speed up the hill

to his own dwelling, there to seek a solution of the mystery, while the young doctor laughingly went on his way towards the town.



CHAPTER VI.



THE whole first story of the Government-house was brilliantly lighted up. A great reception was annually held there on the occasion of the Sovereign's birthday, when all the notabilities of the town and country around were wont to flock to the Castle. This year the usual levée was to be followed by a ball, an innovation mainly due to the presence of Baroness Harder and her daughter, and one which met with the

decided approbation of all the feminine world of R——.

It was too early as yet for the arrival of the guests, but the state-apartments were resplendent with light, and the servants, having put the finishing-touch to their preparations, had withdrawn to their posts in the ante-chambers and hall. Gabrielle had dressed more quickly than her mother; that lady was still severely exercising her maid's patience by perpetually finding some fresh thing in her attire which needed alteration or improvement. So the young Baroness, knowing how useless it would be to wait, came on alone to a small salon, the first of a long suite of rooms only thrown open on the occasion of great ceremonies.

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A conspicuous ornament of this salon was a picture in a richly-gilt frame, well

set off by the dark velvet hangings. It represented the Baron's deceased consort, and was the work of a celebrated artist. Not even the painter's cunning hand, however, had been able to endow those rather pleasing, but insipid and unmeaning features with any special interest; a certain aristocratic dignity of bearing, and an extreme elegance in the toilette and accessories, were all that might for a moment captivate attention. An observer of this portrait, calling to mind the Baron's striking appearance, so full of character and power, would feel intuitively how great must have been the intellectual distance between husband and wife, how impossible any mutual attraction or real companionship.

Gabrielle had paused before this picture, and was still considering it, when a door



at the farther end of the long suite of rooms, which gave access to the Governor's private apartments, opened, and Raven himself appeared. He was in full dress to-day, in honour of the occasion, and his handsome court-suit with the broad ribbon on his breast lent additional stateliness to his figure, as he walked through the rooms slowly with his accustomed proud and lofty mien.

"Why, Gabrielle, dressed already! What are you doing there, wrapt in meditation before that picture?"

There was audible dissatisfaction in the tone in which the last words were spoken. Gabrielle did not notice it. She answered :

"I was wondering to see my aunt's portrait here. Could you not find a place for it in your own rooms?"

"No," was the short, but decided reply.

"But these salons are not opened many times during the year. Why do you not hang the picture in your study?"

"Why should I?" asked the Baron, coldly. "Your aunt never came there. I had her portrait brought to the drawing-room, which is certainly its most fitting place. Well, what do you think of the state-apartments at the Castle? It is the first time you have seen them fully lighted up."

This sudden diversion proved how irksome to him had been the previous topic. Without more ado, he took Gabrielle's arm, led her away from her aunt's portrait, and began a tour of inspection through the rooms, pointing out and explaining many objects of interest. The folding-doors

were all thrown back, so that the eye could wander at will through the long and glittering vista. A princely residence, indeed, the Governor could boast, and the grave and somewhat antique style of decoration was in keeping with the architectural taste of the building. The rich ornamentation of walls and ceilings, the deep window-niches and high marble fire-places, dated from the Castle's earlier times. They had been left untouched ; but to them had been associated costly damask or satin hangings, heavy velvet curtains, rich gilding, all of which, illuminated by innumerable wax-lights, produced a really dazzling effect.

The young Baroness Harder was not one to remain unimpressed by such a scene. She perfectly revelled in the bright surroundings, as, with a heart

brimming over with gladness and expectation, she tripped along by her guardian's side. She had very quickly regained all her old ease of manner in her intercourse with him. That strange hour by the 'Nixies' Well' had long since been forgotten, together with the transient seriousness it had called forth. Like a dream, its influences had come upon her ; swiftly and traceless as a dream they had vanished again from her mind. On that sunny ground nothing approaching a shadow could for any length of time hold its own. Gabrielle certainly felt that during the last few days the Baron had treated her with unwonted gentleness and indulgence. He had even determined on giving this ball, in order that, as he said, certain restless little feet might have a chance of dancing themselves weary. It was an unheard-of

concession from him who looked on all festive gatherings at the Castle as so many onerous duties imposed on him by etiquette, so many drawbacks to his position ; but the young lady was too accustomed to be spoiled by her parents and all about her, to be struck with any special surprise at the favour shown her. She met her guardian's kindness, as she had previously met his stern reserve, with the petulance and whimsical caprice of a child. To-day the thought of the coming fête drove all else into the background. Sparkling and overflowing with all sorts of droll and merry conceits, the clear ripple of her laughter broke again and again on the solemn stillness of those stately galleries.

Raven was grave and silent as usual ; but he listened to her chatter with visible

satisfaction, and his eyes were fixed, as though unconsciously, on the blooming young creature hanging on his arm and looking up at him with happy, beaming, radiant eyes. Gabrielle had never appeared more lovely than on this evening in her cloud-like white ball-dress, twined here and there with flowery wreaths, and with a garland of blossoms daintily set on her fair head. So fascinating was her charm, so dewy-fresh her youthful grace and beauty, she might have been one of the airy mischievous elves of the legend, quickened into life and come hither to disport itself. In the sea of light which streamed through the halls, she was the culminating point of brightness.

They had finished their round, and arrived at the principal reception-room, which was adorned with the portraits of

divers historical and princely personages. A dazzling chandelier lit up the splendid, but as yet untenanted, space, which, in spite of its festive decorations, was almost awesome in its stillness and emptiness. No sound was to be heard but the Baron's echoing step and the rustle of his companion's dress.

"It is like being in an enchanted castle," said Gabrielle, playfully. "We are the only living creatures amid all this sleeping splendour. I had no idea you had so many fine things at your disposal, Uncle Arno. It must be grand to feel one's self the master of such a place."

The Baron cast a general, highly indifferent glance around, as he replied :

"You think there is something very enviable in that, no doubt. I myself have

never attached much importance to these adjuncts of my position."

"Nor to this, either?"

Gabrielle pointed to the ribbon on his breast. The order the Baron wore was one of the highest in the land, and was conferred only in very exceptional cases.

"Nor to this either," said Raven, quietly; "though I would not willingly renounce the one or the other. External splendour should mark the seat of power. To the generality of men, greatness is embodied in these outward symbols; they should, therefore, be taken into due account. I have never lost sight of this, but my efforts have been directed to other aims."

"Which you have attained, like everything else in life."

The Baron was silent for a few seconds.

His eyes rested with an enigmatical expression on the young girl's face. At length he answered her.

"I have attained much—not everything."

"Do you want to mount still higher?" asked Gabrielle, in naïve surprise.

He smiled. "No; this time I should like to retrograde twenty years."

"But, tell me, why?"

"That I might be young again. I have felt sometimes of late that . . . I am growing old."

The young Baroness pointed jestingly to a great panelled mirror opposite them :

"Look there, Uncle Arno, and dare to talk again of being old !"

Raven followed the direction of her hand. There in the clear glass he saw the distinct reflection of his image, the tall,

commanding figure, in all the vigorous maturity of manly strength. He inspected it with a certain satisfaction, not untinged by a slight secret uneasiness.

“And yet I am close upon fifty,” he said slowly. “Do you know that, Gabrielle?”

“Of course I do. But why lay such stress on it? You certainly do not feel as yet any of the premonitory signs of age.”

“For which very reason I am sometimes tempted to forget the fact, and this, under given circumstances, may be dangerous. You should be the last to encourage me in such a weakness.”

Raven broke off suddenly as he met the girl's wondering, questioning gaze; his speech was evidently quite unintelligible to her. He turned away from the mirror, and went on in a lighter tone :

"So you like living here with me, at the Castle?"

"Certainly, when all is bright and gay, as it is this evening," declared Gabrielle. "But in the daytime the Castle often seems to me very dismal and dull. These high-vaulted ceilings, these deep recesses and massive pillars, keep the whole place in shade, and your study is the very gloomiest room I know. The great heavy curtains shut out every ray of sunlight."

"The sun disturbs me when I am at work," explained the Baron.

The young lady tossed her head pettishly:

"But, dear me, man does not live for work alone."

"There are natures—mine, for instance—to which work is a positive want, an absolute necessity. A butterfly, such as

you, cannot understand this. It flies and flutters about in the sunshine, gleaming with a thousand hues—to perish when the first sharp touch brushes the many-coloured dust from its wings. Pleasant enough, but very transitory, this gay butterfly existence!”

There was something of the old sarcastic ring in his voice as he spoke the last words. Gabrielle assumed a highly-offended expression of countenance.

“Oh, so you think I am only a sort of gaily-painted, frivolous moth, Uncle Arno?”

“I think it would be unjust to require of you that you should meet suffering, or face struggles of any kind,” said Raven, more gravely. “Beings of your order are created for the sunshine, and can exist in no other element. Work and the battle of life must be left to me, and to such as me.

To be a sunbeam, and to cheer and lighten the darkness of others, is a vocation, too, in its way. You are quite right, it is foolish, inexorably to exclude the brightness for fear lest it should blind one. Why should not autumn, for once, be gilded by its golden rays?"

He had stooped down, and was looking deep into the young girl's eyes, when a side door was noisily opened, and Baroness Harder rustled over the threshold. Raven quickly drew himself erect, casting a glance that was anything but friendly at his sister-in-law, who, happily, did not observe it. She was at that moment passing the great mirror in the wall, and taking in it a last general review of her appearance. The lady had profited by her brother-in-law's liberality in no sparing fashion. Her rich toilette had but one fault: it was a thought

too overladen to be in perfect taste. The costly satin train was almost lost to view beneath the velvet and lace which covered it. A whole parterre of flowers adorned her hair, and on her neck and arms sparkled the diamonds which Raven's generosity had rescued from the wreck of the Harder fortunes. All that the many arts of the toilette can effect had been accomplished, and with their aid and assistance the Baroness might this evening have made good her claim to be considered a beautiful woman, had it not been for the youthful, blooming daughter at her side. Before the grace and freshness of that seventeen-year-old maiden, no artificial charm could hold its own ; and, by force of contrast, the mother appeared that which, in point of fact, she really was, a faded, middle-aged lady.

“Excuse me for keeping you waiting,”

said she, approaching her brother-in-law with her wonted sweetness of manner. "I did not know you were already in the drawing-room, Arno; and none of the guests have arrived as yet. I hope Gabrielle has been amusing you in my absence."

Raven made no reply. He was visibly annoyed by the interruption.

"Our visitors will be here shortly," he remarked, after a while; and, indeed, scarcely had he spoken the words, when the first carriage drove up.

The Baron offered his arm to his sister-in-law to lead her to her place at the upper end of the room, and, as they went, he glanced with keen scrutiny from mother to daughter.

"Gabrielle does not resemble you in the least, Matilda," he said suddenly,

and his tone betrayed a secret satisfaction.

“Do you think not?” said the Baroness, who would probably have preferred to hear a contrary opinion expressed. “It may be that she is more like her father——”

“She does not bear the smallest resemblance to her father either,” interrupted Raven. “I do not see that she has inherited a single trait from either of her parents—thank God!” he added to himself.

The Baroness was silent, looking aggrieved, though she could not have caught the offensive words which concluded his speech. There was no denying the fact that Gabrielle possessed neither the Harder features nor those of her mother’s family. She was as unlike both parents as she could possibly be.

The first arrivals now appeared, and

were soon followed by others. Carriage after carriage rolled up to the portico of the Government-house, and the rooms gradually began to fill. So numerous had been the invitations issued, that the spacious apartments were hardly large enough to contain the brilliant assembly which soon thronged them. Most of the gentlemen were in civilian dress, but interspersed among the black coats was many a handsome uniform; while the ladies, some in splendid, all in bright apparel, bloomed gay as any flower-garden. The heads of the magistrature, the commandant and officers of the garrison, and those of the neighbouring fortress, were there *au grand complet*, as was also the entire bureaucratic staff, and indeed all who in the social circles of R—— could lay claim to a good position or to any sort of distinction.

The occasion being an official one, it was a matter of course that the invitation should be accepted, and for this reason the burgomaster and the other gentlemen of the corporation had put in an appearance, notwithstanding the conflict pending between them and the Governor, a conflict which daily grew to greater proportions, and increased in intensity.

Baron von Raven seemed to-day altogether to ignore the existing dissensions. He received these guests, as he received all the others, with finished politeness ; but still with that cool reserve of manner which was peculiar to him, and which ever drew about him a sort of invisible barrier.

Baroness Harder at his side did the honours of the house, noting with much satisfaction that she and her daughter were pre-eminently the objects of general in-

terest. The two ladies had hitherto been but little seen in the world of R——, where the autumn gaieties were only just beginning. This was their first formal introduction to the society of the city which was henceforth to be their home. Strangers still to the majority of those present, their close relationship to the Governor assigned to them at once the most prominent place, and it was but natural that they should form a centre of attraction round which all converged.

While the elder lady received those attentions and marks of deference which fall by right to the lady of the house, her daughter's grace and beauty were achieving triumph upon triumph. The young Baroness was constantly surrounded, courted and admired; the younger men, in particular, fairly besieging her with en-

treaties for the promise of a dance during the evening.

Now and then Raven would cast a glance over at the groups ever forming and re-forming round his charming ward ; but the smile on his lips was rather forced. He saw with what pleasure, and with what self-possession, she accepted the homage done her on all sides.

Such flattering triumphs were indeed the best means of whiling away the time ; they helped to assuage the impatience with which Gabrielle looked for the approach of one familiar figure, while endless new faces defiled before her, and strange, unknown names were buzzed into her ears.

George Winterfeld had been in the rooms for some time, but as yet she had hardly exchanged a word with him. When, on his entrance, he had come up to pay his

respects to her mother and herself, the Colonel had arrived at the same instant, wishing to introduce his two sons, and had at once claimed the ladies' attention for himself and the young officers.

Some personages of high rank, also numbering among the intimates of the Castle, had joined the circle; and the young clerk, feeling quite isolated and a stranger in their midst, was forced to withdraw, lest he might appear importunate. Since then he had found no means of approaching Gabrielle. She had remained close to her mother and guardian, taking part with them in the reception of the guests; but now he must hesitate no longer; the first strains of music were already sounding, and George, who was determined at any risk to have a few words with his love during the course of the

evening. threw off his attitude of reserve. He drew near, and begged the young Baroness Harder to accord him a dance.

Gabrielle had foreseen this, and had taken care to keep at least one free. She promptly consented. The Baron, who was talking to Councillor Moser, heard her reply. He turned round, and looked at the two in surprise.

"I thought you had not a dance at your disposal," said he. "Have you really one free?"

"Fräulein von Harder has been so kind as to promise me the second waltz," declared George.

The Baron frowned.

"Indeed, Gabrielle? If I mistake not, you refused that dance to Colonel Wilten's son."



"Certainly I did. I had already promised it to Mr. Winterfeld."

"Oh!" said Raven, slowly. "Well, he who is first in the field assuredly has the best right. Baron Wilten will deplore his mischance in arriving too late."

As he spoke thus, he scanned Gabrielle's face with a keen investigating glance; then, turning from her, his look riveted itself on George. At this moment the cavalier who had been fortunate enough to secure the young lady's promise for the first dance, came up and offered her his arm. George bowed, and stepped back. There was a movement among the company. The younger portion of it streamed off towards the ball-room, while the elders dispersed through the adjoining salons. The great drawing-room grew comparatively empty, and Baroness von Harder

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was just thinking of leaving her post in it, when her brother-in-law came up to her.

“You know something of Assessor Winterfeld ?” he said in a low tone.

The Baroness nodded assent.

“I have told you that we made his acquaintance in Switzerland this summer.”

“Did he often come to your house ?”

“Pretty often. I was always pleased to receive him, and should have continued to see him here, if you had not expressed so decided a wish to the contrary.”

“I do not desire to admit the young clerks to my private circle,” replied the Baron, curtly ; “and I cannot understand, Matilda, how in the retirement, in which you were then supposed to be living, you could grant the first stranger you met an entrance to your house, and allow him per-



fect freedom of intercourse with your daughter."

"Oh, it was quite an exceptional case," pleaded the Baroness. "The Assessor had rendered us a signal service one day when we were in danger on the lake. You know that he——"

"Brought you and Gabrielle through the shallow water to land without the smallest difficulty," concluded Raven. "Yes, I know that; and I do not doubt that he has taken advantage of this slight service, which any fisher-boy could have rendered you, to pose as your deliverer, not altogether unsuccessfully, it would seem. Gabrielle has just accorded him a dance which she had refused to young Baron Wilten, and which, in all probability, she had held in reserve for Mr. Winterfeld. This familiarity may be accounted for, no

doubt, by the previous acquaintanceship ; but it is a proceeding which I, nevertheless, consider most improper. The promise she has given cannot be recalled ; but I beg of you to see that Gabrielle does not dance more than once with this young man. I most decidedly object to it."

There was suppressed, but very evident anger in his tone. The Baroness was rather surprised at his displaying so much irritation, which the occasion hardly seemed to warrant ; but she hastened to assure him that she would speak to her daughter, and then took the arm offered her by Colonel Wilten, who had come to lead her to the ball-room.

The Baron sauntered through the other rooms, where much animated conversation was going on. Joining first one group and then another, he would enter into a dis-

cussion here, make a few passing remarks there, or merely exchange amenities with some guest he had not hitherto welcomed. With the burgomaster he chatted amicably, making no allusion to the differences existing between them. Pleasant and affable in his manner to a few, condescending to others, polite to all, he was familiar with none. He bore himself with the ease and quiet assurance of one who is accustomed to occupy the first place, and assumes the lead as a matter of course—a position which all those about him had long tacitly accepted.

“One would fancy we were the guests of our Sovereign himself, and not of his representative,” said the burgomaster to the Superintendent of police, as the two met. “Upon my word, the airs his Excellency is pleased to give himself on these occa-

sions are ineffable, but they would be more becoming in a monarch than in the Governor of a province. Have you been honoured yet with gracious speech and royal dismissal?"

The person addressed smiled his usual ready smile, taking no notice of the other's caustic tone.

"I am really surprised to see you here," he replied. "From the hostile attitude you and the other members of the corporation have lately adopted towards the Governor, I was afraid you might collectively decline the invitation."

"How could we?" asked the burgo-master, with some heat. "The fête is given in honour of our Sovereign. Had we refused to take part in it, our absence would have been looked upon as a demonstration against the throne ; it would have

laid us open to misconstruction of the worst kind, and we are particularly anxious to avoid giving offence in those high quarters. The Baron knows very well that it was this consideration alone which brought us here. We should not be likely to come to a ball given in *his* honour."

"On your side, you should not push matters too far," advised his companion. "You must know Baron von Raven pretty well by this time. There is no yielding, no compromise to be expected from him."

"And from us still less. We intend to stand firmly by our rights, and the future will show whether a Governor, who takes up such an attitude towards us, can permanently hold his own."

"He will hold his own, that is certain,"

said the Superintendent, decidedly. "You have nothing to hope there. His influence in high places is boundless."

The burgomaster started, and cast a scrutinising look at the speaker.

"You seem to be very well informed on the subject. True, you came to us from the capital, and have no doubt friends and connections there."

"No, not that," replied the other, coolly repelling the insinuation. "But it appears to me that the Baron's line of conduct shows sufficiently how sure he feels of his position, and how all-powerful he knows his influence to be in certain regions. You would do better not to provoke any open rupture between the town and him. A catastrophe can very well be avoided even yet."

So saying, he went off. The burgo-

master looked after him with a grim frown of displeasure.

“Yes, yes,” he muttered ; “avoid a catastrophe at any cost, so that my friend the Superintendent may be able to preserve the neutrality of which he makes such a show. He has positively contrived to pose as the Governor’s obedient servant, and at the same time to pass himself off in the town as the amiable, moderate man who seeks to mediate, and only obeys his chief because he must. I would rather by far have an open enemy such as Raven ; with him one knows at least what one has to expect, but these neutrals who speak fair to both parties, and mean honourably by neither—I, for my part, have no faith in them.”

Meanwhile, in the ball-room, dancing was being pursued with much spirit, and

the couples were already forming for the second waltz. Gabrielle was at the height of enjoyment, and fluttered from one dance to another without rest or respite. She delighted in the amusement at all times, and now drank in, in greedy draughts, the incense offered her on all sides. She lent a willing ear to the flattery and reverential homage of her partners, and never noticed with what a grave, reproachful gaze George's eyes followed her, as she thus accepted all their tributes with airy playful coquetry.

When at last he came to her to remind her of her promise and lead her out among the dancers, she gave him her hand with a bright smile indicative of perfect content.

"Your young ward is really a charming creature," said Colonel Wilten to his host, who had strolled into the ball-room, and,

an unusual proceeding on his part, stayed, looking on at the dance. "I only fear your Excellency will not keep her long. Some gay cavalier will be coming to take her from you."

"Bah!" answered Raven, with a touch of impatience. "There can be no question of that at present. Gabrielle is little more than a child."

The Colonel laughed.

"Our young ladies are not children at seventeen. Fräulein von Harder would decidedly protest against such a notion. Just observe how gracefully she floats along with her partner. The sunny style of beauty peculiar to her shines with wonderful effect this evening. Positively I envy you your fatherly rights where that sweet girl is concerned."

Fatherly rights! The words seemed to

jar on the Baron. A deep frown gathered on his brow as, without replying, he watched every movement of the young couple who now absorbed all his attention.

Wilten had not spoken quite at random. He had remarked the assiduous court his eldest son was paying to the young Baroness, who, as presumptive heiress to her guardian, would certainly be a brilliant match. The Colonel would, decidedly, have had no objection to relieve the latter of his fatherly rights. A daughter-in-law so rich and handsome would have been right welcome to him, and it occurred to him he might by a few words clear the way towards so desirable a consummation. But his hints passed unnoticed, and for the present he was fain to let the subject drop.

"I was speaking just now to the Superintendent of police," he began again.

"He thinks there is nothing to be apprehended ; but he has taken all the necessary precautionary measures, in case of any disturbances in the town to-day."

"To-day! why to-day particularly?" asked Raven, absently, and still pursuing his observations.

"Well, a general holiday gives occasion for all sorts of meetings, especially among the lower orders, and in the present irritated state of public opinion this is a fact not to be overlooked. When heads are heated, trouble may come of such gatherings."

The conversation did not appear to possess much interest for the Governor. He hardly listened, being visibly engaged with other thoughts.

"Do you think so?" he replied indifferently.

The Colonel looked at him in surprise.

"Why, Baron, you should know it better than another. We were discussing the matter only yesterday, and it is, unfortunately, no secret that the popular excitement is directed against you in a very special manner. Councillor Moser tells me you have lately received another threatening letter."

Raven shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

"I have half-a-dozen of them in my waste-paper basket. Their authors ought to have discovered by this time that such absurdities make no impression on me."

Wilten glanced around. They were standing at the end of the long gallery, and at that moment no one was near

enough to everhear their words. The Colonel went on in a low tone :

"You should not, however, absolutely challenge danger. It is most imprudent for you to go into the town on foot and unaccompanied, no measures being taken to ensure your safety. I wanted to speak to your Excellency about it before, to beg you to desist from such ventures. We do not know whether the mob may not be systematically incited to violence. The whole burgher class is leagued together against you."

"So much the better," said Raven, mechanically, his eyes still riveted on one particular spot in the scene before them.

The Colonel gave a little start of surprise.

"Your Excellency?"

The movement recalled the Baron to

himself. He turned quickly to his interlocutor.

"Pardon me, I am somewhat absent. I . . . I hardly followed you. What were we saying?"

"I was begging you to have more regard for your personal safety."

"Ah! yes. You must excuse my inattention. A man, who is daily called on to give his mind to a hundred different matters, has some difficulty in shaking off the cobwebs, even on a festive occasion like the present."

"Really, the load of work you take on yourself is quite too heavy," observed the Colonel. "The most enduring strength must break down at last beneath such a constant strain. Look at those enviable young people yonder, who have no suspicion as yet of all these cares. They

dance, and laugh, and chatter, and are happy among themselves.”

“And are happy among themselves,” repeated Raven. “Just so.”

Deep bitterness lay in his words, and yet no brighter or more animated scene than the one before them could well have presented itself. The handsome, spacious room flooded with light, the gaily-sounding music, and the blooming, youthful crowd swiftly moving to its cadence ; surely there was nothing here to arouse a bitter or a gloomy thought ! Just then Gabrielle flew by with her partner. The Colonel was right. Never had her beauty shone so radiantly, never had it produced so triumphant an effect as now, when, yielding herself heart and soul to the pleasure of the dance, she sparkled in a very effervescence of happy excitement. The clear stream of

light from a thousand sconces; the joyous music, the handsome rooms with their festive decorations—these were the surroundings, this the frame which best suited her figure; here she found her true element, wherein she freely breathed, and her glowing cheeks and bright eyes showed how entrancing to this neophyte were the delights of her first ball. Her whole being seemed transfigured, illumined with radiant contentment, as she floated by in George's arms. He, too, appeared to have forgotten the world about him, to have lost count of all else in the joy of seeing his dear one again, in the bliss of feeling her so near.

Infinite happiness beamed in his eyes as they passed on, her arm resting on his, her breath fanning his cheek; those eyes spoke but too plainly the secret of his

heart. The young couple were at this moment so supremely blest that they forgot all caution, and a keen observer might easily divine that the light shining in their faces was kindled by something other than the mere intoxication of the waltz. The romantic glamour of a first love was about them, encircling them with its bright aureole.

That keen observer was nigh at hand. Raven still kept his place at the end of the room. A knot of gentlemen had gathered round him and the Colonel, and he was apparently entering with zest into their conversation; but his eyes, as by some fascination, remained fixed on the dancers. As he looked, his gaze grew ever more ardent, more piercing, and it must have had in it some magnetic power of attraction, for, when Gabrielle came round a

second time, she turned her head slowly, moved as it were by some mysterious influence, towards the spot where he stood.

For a moment her guardian's eyes met hers. Suddenly a deep glow spread over the young girl's face, and the Baron's features lighted up with one fiery, menacing flash. Then he turned away with a quick, impatient movement.

This dance was followed by a long pause destined for the taking of refreshments. The company left the ball-room, where the heat was becoming intolerable, and sought the buffet and adjoining cool retreats, dispersing at will through the various apartments, and breaking up into merry, chattering groups.

Now at length came the long looked-for moment when George and Gabrielle might

hope to exchange some words in private, free, unconstrained words such as they had not yet been able to address to each other. Hitherto the eyes of the assembled company had been on them, making familiar speech impossible.

A distant boudoir, untenanted for the time being—though a lively hum of voices told of neighbours in the adjoining room—served as the desired refuge. Thither the young Baroness Harder and Assessor Winterfeld repaired, and, standing opposite each other by the fire-place, entered into what to a chance intruder would have seemed a quiet, commonplace conversation, though, in truth, that low-spoken dialogue differed widely from the conventional talk current in society.

“So at last we have one minute alone together,” whispered George, passionately ;

"the first that has been accorded to us for weeks! I fancied it would be easier to feel you near, and yet beyond my reach."

"Yes, you were right," said Gabrielle, in the same low tone. "We are very, very far apart here, though you daily come to the Castle. I always hoped you would find some means of breaking through the barriers which separate us."

"Have I not tried to the best of my ability? You know how your mother met my overtures. She received me kindly enough when I called, but she was careful not to let fall a word which could be construed into an invitation to repeat the visit. I cannot force myself into a house where I am clearly told that my presence is not wanted."

A slight frown gathered on the young lady's fair brow.

"That was not mamma's fault. She would have welcomed you now as willingly as formerly. It was my guardian who prevented her inviting you. I got mamma to tell him of your call, and of our previous acquaintance, because I——"

"Because you dared not."

"I dare anything that is possible," asserted Gabrielle, with some irritation; "but to hold out under Uncle Arno's look, when one has anything to conceal from him, is just impossible, and it is of no use attempting it. Well, he pronounced most decidedly against the intended invitation. No personal offence to you was meant, for, of course, he has not the faintest suspicion of any understanding

between us ; but he will not allow any intercourse between us and the younger officials employed in his bureaux—so we had to submit.”

“I was sure of it,” said George. “I know my chief. He and his must remain inaccessible to all whom he considers beneath him. Well, there is this to be said, not even his despotic will can separate us much more completely than we have been separated during the last few weeks. I have never seen you but from a distance, and when, at last, we do meet, as to-night, we are forced to keep up an appearance of coldness and indifference. I have to look on while you are courted and made much of, to see every one able to approach you but myself. I, who have the first and sole right to you, am condemned to silence and the reserve of

a stranger. Gabrielle, I can bear it no longer."

Gabrielle raised her eyes to his face. A bewitching smile played round the corners of her dimpled mouth, as she replied :

"I do not think the 'stranger' is so much to be pitied. He knows very well that I am his, and his alone."

"On a ball-night such as this you certainly are not mine," replied George, rather bitterly. "You are given to the gaiety and the dance and the homage paid you on all sides. You belong to anything and every one rather than to me. All the time that passed before that waltz, I was striving to meet your glance. Surrounded by your admirers, you had no eyes for me."

The reproach struck home, wounding by its very justice ; but the young lady was not accustomed to reproaches in this

quarter, and she thought it very cruel and unfair that he should try to spoil her pleasure. The smile vanished from her lips, giving way to a most ungracious expression of countenance, and she was about to utter a sharp retort when Lieutenant Wilten appeared in the doorway.

“Fräulein von Harder,” he said, hastening to her. “You are missed in the ball-room. His Excellency and the Baroness have both been inquiring for you. I volunteered to look for you. Will you accept my escort back to your anxious friends?”

Under other circumstances Gabrielle would have let this intruder feel how unwelcome he was; but now she was angry, justly offended, as she thought, and not at all disposed to take the offence

patiently—so she bowed her head coldly to George, and accepted the young Baron's arm with great affability of manner. The Lieutenant led her from the room, casting, as he went, a triumphant glance back at the discomfited rival left behind.

George looked after the pair with angry knitted brows. This childish revenge wounded him more than he cared to confess to himself, and again the old tormenting doubt arose within him—the doubt as to whether it were right for him to withdraw this charming, but most superficial young creature from the glittering sphere for which she seemed created, and to link her existence to that of an earnest, patient worker. True, Gabrielle's love gave him a right to possess her, but—did she love him? Was she really capable of a deep and abiding sentiment? or was her fancy

for him a mere caprice, playful and transient as became her gay, butterfly nature. Suppose she were to be unhappy at his side, or he to make the miserable discovery that the wife of his bosom could meet his ardent love, and reward his sacrifices, only with the inconstancy and waywardness of a child? Perhaps they would both pay for this short day-dream with a whole life-time of misery and regrets!

The young man passed his hand quickly across his brow. He would not listen to the whispered monitions of reason, so utterly at variance with the passionate throbbings of his heart. With a great effort he shook himself free from these torturing thoughts, and was about to leave the room when Councillor Moser came in, accompanied by the Superintendent of police. The former, in honour of the

day, wore a brand-new neck-cloth of snowy whiteness, but of such prodigious dimensions that he could hardly move his head in it, a circumstance which lent additional stiffness to his bearing and solemnity to his mien. The two were holding some animated discussion, but, on catching sight of Assessor Winterfeld, they ceased speaking so abruptly, that that gentleman divined he had been the subject of their conversation. This idea was confirmed by the keen glance with which the Superintendent measured the young official from head to foot, while the Councillor walked straight up to him, and, without a word of preface, addressed him as follows :

“I am glad to meet you here, Assessor. I have to request you to undertake a commission for me.”

George bowed slightly.

"With pleasure. I am at your service."

"Your friend, Dr. Brunnow"—the Councillor accentuated his words, as though some dread and weighty accusation were conveyed in each—"your friend, Dr. Brunnow, has, without my knowledge or desire, assumed the office of my family physician. He has listened to an invalid's statements, has given prescriptions, and even threatened me with a renewal of his visit. I did not at first comprehend how the matter had come about——"

"It was all a misunderstanding," interrupted George. "Max told me of it. He really believed that medical advice was required from him, and he had no notion into whose house an odd chance had led him."

“Well, he knows now,” said Moser, emphatically; “and I must ask you to tell him, once for all, that I should not dream of applying for advice to a doctor bearing so compromised a name, to one whose father is an avowed enemy to the State. Tell him to choose for his revolutionary intrigues some other scene than the house of Councillor Moser, who has ever made it his proud boast that he is surpassed by none in loyalty to his most gracious Sovereign. There are men, gentlemen in the service, who might take example by his line of conduct. It would be well for themselves, for society, and for the State, were they to share the views I have expressed.”

With these words the Councillor inclined his head, or rather attempted to do so, for his neckcloth imposed limits on his will,

and majestically left the room, sublimely conscious of having, in a figurative sense, crushed and slain his adversary. The Superintendent, who had throughout been a silent listener, now drew near.

“You seem to be in disgrace with our loyal friend,” he remarked, in a jesting tone. “He was giving me a long account of your dangerous and treasonable connections. I hope——”

“The Councillor is in error,” interposed George, with quiet distinctness. “The connection with which he reproaches me is a perfectly harmless college friendship, bearing no relation whatever to politics. I can assure you that my friend, who is here solely on a matter of business—to make good his claim to some property he has lately inherited—and who by a droll mistake found his way the other day into the

Mosers' dwelling, has no thought of carrying on revolutionary intrigues either there or elsewhere, and that he will not give you the slightest motive to take an interest in his person."

The Superintendent laughed.

"So much the better. The Councillor grows quite alarming at times through excess of loyalty. He sees ghosts and spectres at every turn. Could he but guess that his own chief was once the comrade and friend of this very Dr. Brunnow, whom he stigmatises as an enemy to the State! You, probably, are not unaware of this fact?"

"I am aware of it, certainly," said George, taken aback by the question. The police-officer's intimate acquaintance with circumstances so remote surprised him greatly.

“How these early friends get separated! How strangely and widely do their paths in life differ!” remarked the other. “The Governor, Baron Arno von Raven, and a refugee living in exile, no contrast could well be greater! It is said, I believe, that the Baron himself entertained rather extravagant political views in his youth.”

He paused, apparently expecting an answer, but none came. Assessor Winterfeld listened in silence.

“I have even heard it asserted that Herr von Raven was in some way mixed up with that trial which resulted in the imprisonment of Dr. Brunnow and his associates. None but vague rumours have reached me, however. You, I dare say, are better informed through your friend and his father.”

“Not at all—we have never gone into

the subject. But, if the Baron had chanced to be connected with the trial in any way, the fact could easily be ascertained through the official reports of the case."

The Superintendent cast a glance at the young man which seemed to say: 'If that were so, I should hardly be wasting my time and pains on so stiff-necked a person as yourself.' He replied aloud:

"The Baron's name is not mentioned in the official documents. If he really had anything to do with the business, all accounts were settled between himself and his future father-in-law, the Minister. He must have fully exonerated himself from blame in the latter's estimation, for the brilliant fortunes which have attended him throughout his career date from that precise time."

"Very probably," assented George, with cool reserve; "but these events, which happened full twenty years ago, must be more familiar to you than to me. You, I should suppose, were then entering on your professional duties, whilst I was still a mere child."

The Superintendent saw that here there was no inclination to enlighten him, that from this source he should not get the information he required. He gave up the attempt, and when they had exchanged a few unimportant remarks, the two gentlemen parted.

Only once again during the evening did George find an opportunity of speaking to Gabrielle, or rather, she herself it was who gave him the opportunity. As he stood looking on at the cotillon, taking no part in it, she fluttered up to him, light and airy

as any sylph, and led him to the dance. While they were making the tour of the room, their eyes met. The moodiness had melted from his face, and about her lips there played again the captivating smile which his words had lately scared away.

“Must I not enjoy myself? Are you still jealous?” whispered Gabrielle, with a delicious mixture of roguishness and penitence. George would not have been young or in love, could he have withstood that smile and that appeal. He was already convinced that he had done wrong to reproach his darling with her radiant gaiety. She was so innocently happy in it—and, in spite of her caprices and wilful ways, had not this beaming, joy-loving child found her way to his very heart of hearts?

“My Gabrielle!” was all he said, but infinite tenderness lay in the softly-spoken words. A slight pressure from her hand answered his. The reconciliation was sealed.

So the hours flew by, and the ball took the brilliant course usual to such assemblies. Midnight had long passed when the guests departed, and the great galleries grew empty once more. Baroness Harder, well satisfied with the part she had played on the occasion, was about to retire to her own room. She had taken leave of her brother-in-law, and had turned to give some directions to the servants, when Gabrielle in her turn approached to bid her guardian good-night. Raven saw that she meant to give him her hand, but he remained immovable, with folded arms, and there was a look of cold severity on his

features, as he addressed her in a low tone.

“ I have made a singular discovery this evening, Gabrielle. There appears to be a degree of familiarity between you and Assessor Winterfeld which is highly unbecoming. It is not compatible with his position, nor with yours in my house. I will venture to hope that in permitting him such freedom you have been misled by inexperience alone ; but you will have to give me an explanation of this. I must know how far your acquaintance with this gentleman has really gone.”

Again a crimson flush suffused the girl's face, deep as the glow which had dyed it some time before when she had met her guardian's accusing glance during that waltz ; but this most unwonted tone from his mouth aroused her temper and her

defiance. She drew herself up with a resolute air.

“If you wish it, Uncle Arno——”

“Not now,” he interrupted, with a wave of the hand. “It is too late to-night, and I do not wish that your mother should be present at our interview. I shall expect to see you in my study to-morrow morning early, and you will then have the kindness to answer such questions as I shall put to you. Good-night.”

He turned away without offering her his hand or waiting for a reply, and walked to the farther end of the room. Gabrielle stood still in mute consternation. It was the first time the Baron had displayed harshness towards herself, and for the first time she began to realise that the matter would not blow over so lightly as in her gay optimism she had hitherto hoped. A

catastrophe was imminent, inevitable : thus she pondered ; and only when her mother called her did she start from her reverie and hasten to the Baroness's side.

Raven watched her as she went. His lips were firmly set, as though in repressed anger or pain, and a dark thundercloud lay on his brow.

“ I must know the truth,” he muttered. “ But, after all, what will it amount to ? Mere childish folly, some travelling episode invested by both with all necessary romance, and in the course of a few weeks to be utterly forgotten. No matter, I will take care that such looks are not translated into words, and that an end is put to the affair in time.”



CHAPTER VII.



HE next morning broke grey and cloudy. It heralded in a wet, cold September day, which told unmistakably that summer's opulent splendour was a thing of the past, and that autumn's chill reign had commenced. A fine drizzling rain was falling: the mountains were shrouded in thick mist, and in the Castle-garden the wind was chasing the first leaves from the trees.

Baron von Raven sat alone in his study.

A middle-sized room, with a lofty ceiling and one large bay-window framed in a deep recess, this study certainly did produce a gloomy impression. It was not less handsomely fitted up than the other apartments of the Castle ; but here the prevailing grandeur was toned down to a style of severe simplicity. In the costly panelling of the walls, in the heavy sculptured oak furniture, and in the rich brocade of the curtains, the same subdued shades of colour were preserved ; and the antique black marble chimneypiece was in harmony with the appointments of the room, from which all showy effects were rigorously excluded. The bureau, with its load of papers and parchments, the books ranged round the walls—a library wherein every branch of knowledge was represented—and the maps, plans, and drawings distributed about on

the different tables, gave a fair idea of the numberless interests here claiming attention, of the vast aggregate of business constantly despatched. It was not a comfortable room to dwell in, nor one suited to rest or repose. Everything in it told of work—of grave, incessant occupation.

Raven generally got through a good deal of business in the morning hours ; but to-day he sat at his writing-table, resting his head on his hand, and cast not so much as a glance at the pile of letters and memorials, of reports and schedules, before him. His countenance wore the pallor born of a sleepless night, and its austerity of expression was more striking than usual ; otherwise his features were as of bronze in their perfect immobility.

Immersed in sombre thought, he did not even look up as the study-door opened.

A servant, whom he had sent to the Baroness's apartments to summon his ward to him, entered, and announced that the young lady would be with his Excellency immediately.

A few minutes later, Gabrielle followed the messenger, and, coming into the study, closed the door behind her. She wore a plain white morning dress, the simplicity of which became her well, and even in the grey uncertain light of that autumn day her brightness shone undimmed. Last night's ball had left no trace behind. Her elastic youth knew as yet neither languor nor lassitude. The girl's face was blooming and fresh as ever, its colour being, perhaps, at this moment a little heightened by excitement, for there was no mistaking the nature of the interview she had now to undergo. With the entrance of that

slender white figure, a sunbeam had stolen into the gloomy room : all at once it seemed to grow lighter and more cheerful.

The Baron himself must have had some sense of this. He rose, and advanced a few paces to meet his visitor. At sight of her, his features relaxed from their set sternness, and his voice, though very grave, was not harsh, as he addressed her :

“ I have several questions to put to you, Gabrielle. My words last night will have prepared you for them ; and I shall expect to hear from you in reply the truth, and the whole truth.”

He put forward a chair for her, and seated himself opposite her. The young lady's attitude bespoke confidence rather than timidity. It had, of course, become

manifest to her that the tactics by which she prevailed in any dispute with her mother would not here stand her in stead ; that she could not hope to carry her point by open defiance, or by a few tears ; but she had resolved to avow her love boldly, and to show herself strong, heroic even, in its defence.

The Baron, she knew, doubted her firmness with an incredulity fixed, and to the full as insulting, as that professed by George ; and, strangely enough, she felt a far greater satisfaction in convicting her guardian of his error, than in raising her lover's estimate of her character. At this moment the romance of the situation was uppermost in her mind, outweighing any anxiety as to the issue of the impending conflict.

“ My questions concern Assessor Winter-

feld," began the Baron. "Your mother tells me you met him in Switzerland. He frequently came to your house, and you probably held much free and unconstrained intercourse with him."

"Yes," said Gabrielle, somewhat disconcerted. The matter was not taking a dramatic turn at present. Her guardian spoke in the most tranquil of tones.

"Have you often seen or spoken to him, since you came to R——?"

"Twice only—the day he called on mamma, and last night at the ball."

"On no other occasion?"

"No."

The Baron drew a deep breath of relief.

"This young man evidently pays you a degree of attention which oversteps the bounds of ordinary gallantry," he con-

tinued ; "and you seem not only to suffer, but to encourage it."

Gabrielle was silent.

"I expect an answer, Gabrielle."

She looked up. There was no sign of fear in her face. It spoke rather of open rebellion.

"And if that were the case?" she asked.

"It would be high time to put an end to such childish nonsense," Raven answered sharply. "You must know very well that nothing serious could ever come of it."

The young lady tossed her fair head with an offended, yet a most resolute air. Now came the decisive moment ; now was the time to show her heroism, and to inspire her guardian with respect. He had no idea as yet how grave the matter in question was. He treated it as a silly, passing fancy.

"It is not mere childish nonsense," she replied, with the utmost decision. "George Winterfeld loves me."

The Baron's eye flashed fire. He rose quickly, and folded his arms on his breast, as though to compel himself to be calm; but his voice was low and menacing as he answered her:

"Oh, oh! he has told you this already? Last night, perhaps, during your waltz?"

"He told me long ago, in Switzerland, that he loved me."

Raven laughed out loud—a short, harsh laugh.

"I suspected it, I vow," he said, with bitter sarcasm. "So you two were acting through a romance under your mother's eyes, she having no faintest notion of it the while. Well, it is what one might expect from her. But it is less easy to

deceive me. If you intended that, you should have guarded your looks better ; they were far too eloquent yesterday evening. I can make many excuses for you, Gabrielle, on account of your youth and inexperience—a few sentimental phrases suffice to turn the head of a girl of seventeen ; but this romantic trifling is too dangerous for me to permit it to go on longer. I shall remind Assessor Winterfeld of the barriers which separate him from the Baroness Harder—from my niece, and that in a way which will impress itself on his memory. Henceforward you will neither see nor speak to him. I forbid this folly, once for all."

He strove in vain to preserve his sarcastic tone ; the terrible irritation which lay behind would break through at times. Gabrielle, indeed, did not remark this ; she

heard only the scornful derision of his words. The girl was prepared for reproaches, for an outbreak of fierce anger on the part of her guardian, for she knew how his pride would revolt against such a union ; but, instead of wrathfully upbraiding her, he treated George and herself as a pair of naughty children, who must be duly punished for the fault they had committed. He spoke in the most contemptuous tone of ‘ trifling ’ and of ‘ sentimental phrases,’ and thought that, by launching his edict, he could at one stroke destroy the happiness of two grown-up persons. This was too much. The young lady now rose in her turn, vibrating with indignation.

“ You cannot do that, Uncle Arno,” she said vehemently. “ George has a claim on me which he will certainly vindicate.

He has my word—my promise. I am betrothed to him.”

She had made her confession boldly, unhesitatingly ; and now she paused, waiting for the coming storm, but none came. Raven replied not a word. A grey pallor overspread his face, and his hand grasped convulsively the back of a great arm-chair that was near him, while he gazed with a strange, fixed look at Gabrielle. She stood before him silent and confused. It was not exactly fear which possessed her, but rather a secret, inexplicable dread growing up within her beneath that gaze, a vague presentiment of coming evil, against which she struggled in vain.

After a minute's pause, the Baron spoke again :

“This matter has certainly gone further than I supposed ; and you have considered

you were doing right in keeping it a secret from your mother and myself?"

"We feared we should be parted if our attachment were known," answered Gabrielle, in a low voice.

"Oh! And what do you imagine will happen now?"

"I do not know; but I am determined I will keep my word to George, come what may, for I love him."

This word at length let loose the fury of the storm hitherto held in check. With a movement of rage, Raven dashed the chair aside, and strode up to the young girl.

"And you dare to say that to me?" he broke out. "You dare, without my knowledge and consent, to enter into an engagement which you know I shall decidedly oppose—to defy me openly? You build on the indulgent kindness I have shown you

up to this time. It is at an end from to-day. Do not challenge me too far, Gabrielle; you may bitterly repent it. I have means of bringing a perverse, rebellious child to reason—means I shall unsparingly use against both you and him. Winterfeld shall answer to me for this surreptitious love-making, for the sweet speeches with which he has befooled you into giving a promise—a promise which is null and void, seeing that you are not free to dispose of yourself as yet. He courts in you the presumptive heiress, and calculates that through her he shall attain to wealth and influence. He may find himself deceived. I alone have to decide as to your future, which is altogether in my hands. Your lot in life depends on me, and if I accord to you a brilliant position, I shall expect implicit obedience in return.

At no time, and under no circumstances, can there be question of such a marriage. I refuse my consent, and you must perforce bend to my will."

Gabrielle had recoiled a step before this fierce outburst, but nevertheless she met it bravely. The "child" possessed more stability, more strength of purpose, than Raven supposed. She was not to be intimidated by his imperious words or threatening looks.

"You have no rights over me, except those of a guardian, and they will expire at my majority," she replied, with most unusual energy. "My future and my position in life concern George alone. I shall accept the lot that he can offer me, whatever it may be. No calculating thought has ever entered his mind with regard to me. George's affection——"

The Baron stamped furiously.

“George, and nothing but George! I forbid you to speak so of this Winterfeld in my presence. You will never be his wife—never, I tell you—at least, while I live.”

The young girl drew herself erect. She was indignant at, rather than daunted by, his extreme vehemence.

“Uncle Arno, you are horribly, cruelly unjust. You——”

Suddenly she stopped. Her eyes met his, and the ardent consuming fire in them seemed to scorch her with its intense glow. It was not the blaze of hatred, nor of anger. There was suffering in that look, fierce, wild pain stimulated almost to madness. Gabrielle pressed both hands on her bosom. She felt as though breath and consciousness were forsaking her;



then, vivid as lightning, with a blinding, stupefying shock, the truth flashed upon her. She grew deadly pale, and caught at the back of the chair as though for support.

This movement of hers in some measure restored the Baron to himself. He saw the great paleness which overspread her features, and attributed it in some measure to fear aroused by his violence. This man, accustomed to the severest self-control, had, probably for the first time in his life, allowed himself to be carried beyond bounds. He felt this, and by a supreme effort of his will endeavoured to master his agitation. A deep and painful silence followed; a silence which weighed on both, but which neither ventured to break. Raven had gone up to the window, and, with his fevered brow pressed

against the panes, remained gazing out into the misty landscape. Gabrielle still stood motionless in her place.

“I have alarmed you with my vehemence,” said the Baron at last, without turning round. “Such matters require to be discussed quietly, and we are neither of us in a fitting frame of mind just now. To-morrow, later on, perhaps——Leave me, Gabrielle.”

She obeyed, walking with bowed head to the door, but there she paused. Again, as on the preceding evening, she felt, without seeing it, the look which rested on her ; and again, as then, she was constrained by some mysterious attraction to meet that look. Raven had, indeed, turned, and was following her with his eyes.

“One thing more,” he said—his voice

was completely under control now, but it had a dull unnatural sound—"not a word, not a line to him. I will speak to him myself."

Gabrielle left the room, and returned to her mother's apartments. The Baroness, who was a late riser, had but just completed her morning toilet. On going into the breakfast-room, she missed her daughter, who was generally there before her, and was about to inquire of the servants as to the reason of her absence when the young girl herself appeared.

"Why, child, where have you been all this time? Not out of doors, I hope, in such miserable weather. You would take a dreadful cold, wandering about in that light morning dress. But you look quite pale and disturbed! Has anything happened?"

"No, mamma," said her daughter, in a low, half-stifled voice.

The Baroness looked at her with concern.

"You are not well, I am sure. You were over-heated with dancing yesterday evening, when we went through those cold corridors. Take a little hot tea, dear—it will do you good."

Gabrielle declined the offered cup.

"No, thank you, mamma. I would rather go back to my room, and try and rest a little."

"But your uncle is accustomed to see you here at breakfast-time."

"Tell him I am not well. He will not miss me to-day. I *cannot* stay."

With these words she left the room. The Baroness remained alone, wondering not a little at her daughter's sudden fit of

reserve, which was as strange to her as the white wan look on that blooming face. At this moment the Baron's valet entered with a message from his Excellency, who begged to be excused—he would not appear at breakfast that morning. Madame von Harder shook her head at this announcement ; but she was not gifted with any special powers of combination, and moreover she knew nothing of the interview which had taken place in her brother-in-law's study. It did not occur to her, therefore, to connect the two circumstances. She thought no more of the matter, but sat down to table, a little put out at having to breakfast alone.

In the Chancellery the Governor's appearance was that day looked for in vain. It was his custom to go there early in the

morning, but on this occasion he remained shut up in his study, and allowed the most necessary business to be transacted by Councillor Moser. The Councillor, who had some pressing matters to submit to his chief's notice, came back from an audience with an important mien, and the tidings that his Excellency was by no means graciously disposed that morning. This was true enough. The Baron had listened to the various reports communicated to him with great impatience and visible absence of mind, had given the needful instructions in a hurried manner most unusual to him, and had dismissed the worthy Councillor as speedily as possible. That gentleman, who always claimed to know more than others, hinted at weighty Government despatches recently received, and all the clerks put their

heads together, and indulged in endless speculations and conjectures.

Half an hour later, Assessor Winterfeld was summoned to the Governor. There was nothing remarkable in this, as he had to take in his report in the course of the morning, and the fact of his being sent for before the appointed hour could easily be explained by the numerous pressing calls on the Baron's time.

The young man, therefore, obeyed the summons with unsuspecting alacrity. He entered the cabinet, his head full of the statement he had prepared, set his papers in order, and waited for the signal to begin.

"We will leave that," said Raven. "The report can stand over for to-day. I have other matters to discuss with you."

George looked up in astonishment, and

only then became aware of his chief's altered attitude. The dignified calm, with which that personage was wont to receive his officials, had stiffened into freezing hauteur.

He stood leaning against the bureau, and eyed the young man before him from head to foot, as though he then saw him for the first time, scanning his features with a severe, unerring scrutiny which seemed to pierce him through and through. Undisguised hostility was expressed in that steady, frowning gaze, as it was, indeed, in the Baron's whole bearing.

George saw this at a glance, and at once understood the words which had struck him as enigmatical. He understood that he alone was the object of the Baron's displeasure, and guessed what had provoked

it. The long-looked-for catastrophe had come at last, and the young man braced himself to face it with quiet resolution.

"I have this morning had an interview with my ward, Baroness Harder, in which your name was mentioned," began the Governor. "No explanations are required from you. I already know what has happened, and I must call you to account for the manner in which you have misled that young lady, causing her to fail most unpardonably in the sincerity and respect she owes to her family."

George cast down his eyes. His quick sense of honour allowed the reproach as well-founded.

"I have possibly erred in remaining silent until now," he replied. "My only excuse lies in the fact that my position has

not yet qualified me to prefer my suit openly."

"Indeed? I should have thought that such an obstacle in the way of your suit would also have prohibited a declaration of your sentiments."

"Had it been premeditated, certainly; but, your Excellency, that was not the case. In an unguarded moment my secret escaped me: only when it had found utterance, when my words had been accepted, did reflection regain the upper hand; and then I was forced to confess to myself that for the present I could advance no grounds entitling me to approach Baroness Harder as a suitor for her daughter's hand."

"It is well you make the admission yourself," remarked the Baron, with withering scorn. "I should otherwise have been

under the necessity of making the fact clear to you. If Fräulein von Harder has made you promises, they, naturally, count for nothing, having been given without my knowledge or her mother's; and it would be simply absurd for you to build on them. Romantic notions should be left to the domain of romance. I regret that my niece should have lent an ear to such extravagant folly, but you will hardly expect me to deal with it as a matter calling for serious consideration."

The young man's face began to flush beneath this contemptuous treatment, and the rising irritation within him betrayed itself in his voice, as he answered :

"I do not know that an earnest and pure affection, which has been tarnished by no unworthy thought, which has held its object as some high and sacred thing

apart, should be met by derision only. I have kept it a secret so far, and have caused Fräulein von Harder to do so likewise, because I knew that time and much continuous labour on my part were needed to remove the obstacles that stand in my path, because I foresaw that every effort would be made to separate us. In that alone am I culpable. My conduct in that respect may deserve blame, but those who have had experience of love will not judge me too harshly. I own I was not prepared to find our mutual attachment treated as mere romantic folly."

"And what do you expect me to think of it?" asked Raven, ironically. "It seems to me you have every reason to be grateful to me for adopting this view of the case, as it alone admits of a lenient judgment. If I knew that you and Gabrielle were seri-

ously contemplating the possibility of a union——” He paused, but the look which completed the sentence was significant enough, and fraught with evil presage.

“Would your Excellency have preferred that we should be attached without contemplating a lifelong union?” asked George, quietly.

“Mr. Winterfeld, you forget yourself,” thundered the Baron. “The blame of this secret understanding lies not with my niece, but with you. That young girl was not in a position to measure its importance, or rightly to estimate the situation. You were fully able to do both, and were aware of the barriers which stood between you: it is with you, therefore, I must now reckon. You are one of my youngest clerks, without name or rank, without fortune or prospects.

By what right do you venture to aspire to the hand of the young Baroness Harder, who is accustomed to all the luxuries of life, and who has a claim to move in circles widely remote from yours?"

"By the same right as that whereon Baron von Raven relied, when, under circumstances in all respects similar, he sued for the hand of the Minister's daughter, who subsequently became his wife—by right of my confidence in the future."

Raven bit his lip. "It appears to be with you a foregone conclusion that in point of success your career will resemble mine. It is rather venturesome on your part to place yourself thus boldly on a par with me. Besides, the comparison does not hold good. I was one of the Minister's most intimate friends long before I became his son-in-law. I knew that he

favoured my suit, and had assured myself of his consent before I addressed his daughter. That is the only honourable course to pursue in such matters. Mark what I say, Mr. Winterfeld."

"Your Excellency, no doubt, acted more correctly, and with more deliberation; but—I loved Gabrielle!"

A furious gleam shot from the Baron's eyes, as he turned them on the audacious offender who dared to remind him that his own marriage had been one of calculation.

"I must beg of you, in my presence, to give the Baroness Harder her fitting title," said he, in his sharpest tone. "As to the disinterestedness of your affection, were you unaware of the fact that my niece is generally looked upon as my heiress?"

"No; but I supposed that any dispositions to that effect would be reversed in

the event of the young Baroness's marrying without her guardian's consent."

"The supposition was correct. And you are really selfish enough to rob the girl you profess to love of all the advantages bestowed on her by birth and fortune? You would condemn her to an existence which would be nothing but one long series of sacrifices? A most noble and disinterested love, truly! Fortunately, Gabrielle Harder is not the heroine required for such an idyll; and I will take care that she does not become the victim of a youthful error, which she would expiate with swift and bitter repentance."

George was silent. That was the sore spot with him. He had often felt, as the Baron said, that Gabrielle was the last woman in the world for such abnegation as this "idyll" demanded.



“Let us make an end of this,” said Raven, drawing himself up, and waving his hand imperiously. “I cannot concede to my niece a right to dispose of her future without my knowledge or consent, and I decline to enter into a discussion respecting wishes and hopes, which are, for me, simply non-existent. You know that a guardian’s powers are unlimited as a father’s, and you are bound to submit to my decision. I shall expect that you, as a man of honour, will abstain from any attempt to carry on this clandestine understanding, which is calculated to injure the young lady’s fame, and has already disturbed her relations with her family. Open intercourse I, naturally, prohibit from this date. You will give me your word that you will in no way seek to communicate with my ward in secret.”



"If I am allowed once more to see and speak to Baroness Harder, even though it be in the presence of her mother."

"No."

"Then I cannot give the required promise."

"Reflect well, Assessor. Remember who it is you are braving," warned the Baron, and there was unmistakable menace in his tone.

The young man's fine clear eyes met those of his chief fearlessly, yet the sombre fire smouldering in these latter was of a nature to make him pause and reflect. The two men stood face to face, like wrestlers, measuring each other's strength before the struggle. The younger, calm and resolute; the elder, vibrating in every nerve with terrible agitation.

"I brave only a harsh and unjust sentence," said George, taking up the last words. "Your Excellency decrees our separation, and we must yield to the sentence, having no arms wherewith to defend ourselves; but to refuse us an interview—the last, probably, for years—is, I repeat it, both harsh and unjust. I do not know how Fräulein von Harder may be worked upon, in what manner my silence and reserve may be interpreted to her. I must, at least, tell her, once for all, that I maintain my right to her hand, and that I will spare no exertion to deserve it. This I shall attempt to say by letter or by word of mouth, with or without your Excellency's leave."

He bowed and went, not waiting for the usual signal of dismissal. Raven threw himself into a chair. The interview had

taken an unexpected course. His intercourse with Winterfeld had hitherto been simply official. He had always considered him to be talented and clever in his profession, without ascribing to him any very extraordinary merit — the difference of position precluded all close contact and deeper interest. To-day, for the first time, they had met, not as superior and subaltern, but as man to man ; and to-day the Baron had discovered that behind that modest demeanour and that mild, clear brow, there lay concealed an energy equal to his own.

He was accustomed to break down all resistance by the sheer might of his imposing word and presence, but on this occasion that might and all the prestige of his exalted station had been summoned to his aid in vain. He had succeeded neither

in abasing, nor in intimidating his adversary ; in more than one respect he must acknowledge him as his peer. Gabrielle had bestowed her love on no unworthy object ; this was the secret trouble which gnawed at the man's heart, as he lay back brooding in his chair. He would have given much really to be able to look on this attachment as a piece of youthful folly, and to tear the two asunder in the name of reason and common sense. Now there remained to him only that miserable pretext of rank and fortune, and his own case might be cited to show how easily these obstacles are surmounted when an energetic will sets itself to break them down ; though, with him, the incentive to action had been of another and a lower order.

That most beautiful and sacred privilege

of youth, a spontaneous, soaring passion, heedless of hindrances, and oblivious of worldly possibilities, Arno Raven had never enjoyed, or cared to enjoy. He had put from him the dream of love and happiness, while love and happiness were the just appanage of his years; his ambitious plans left him no time to indulge in dreaming. Now, in the autumn of his life, the fair vision rose before him, golden, ethereal, spreading about him its soft, delusive shimmer, taking his best strength captive, until he suddenly awoke, and found himself in the presence of a stern, cruel reality. Youth yearns after youth, and the middle-aged man, at the very zenith of his success and greatness, looked from his lonely height on the waste desolate tract around. Perhaps in this

hour he would have given his hardly-won success and all the sweets of power only to be young again.

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